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Studies on the History of the Hungarian Working-Class Movement (1867 – 1966)

edited by

Henrik Vass

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Introduction

The history of the working-class movement is an independent branch of scholarship. Systematic research in this field commenced in Hungary in 1948 when the Institute of Party History was founded. It was then that the collection and classification of basic sources began and archives and a reference library were set up for the study of working-class movement history.

A number of research workers who regarded the history of the Hungarian working-class movement as their calling, began their systematic work at this time. It would not have been possible to write the history of the Hungarian working-class movement in a scientific way had this basic work not been done. The extensive publication of sources was started and so was their scientific elaboration. However, at that time this development was seriously impeded by ideological dogmatism and subjectivism, and by the distortions which were evidenced in politics and public life. The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party required and advanced fundamental changes in this field. This new stage in Hungarian historiography – and within it the study of the history of the working-class movement – preserved and continued all that had been correct and fruitful in the previous period for the Marxist examination of Hungarian history. At the same time, those questions which, in consequence of dogmatism and revisionism, had been solved incorrectly were now being examined anew and on a higher plane.

Today we can rightfully claim that the numerous significant works of a historical nature which have been published in the past fifteen years denote a more comprehensive, more scientifically grounded view of the problems of the development history of the Hungarian working-class movement and of the Communist Party than those written earlier. However, one must not rigidly separate the various stages in Hungarian Marxist historiography, let alone confront them with one another. In the course of its twenty-five years of work the Institute of Party History has, in collaboration with research workers of other institutes, laid solid foundations for this research. The writing of the working-class movement's history has become an integral part of our whole historiography, taking its rightful place in historical studies. There are now available a whole series of scientific reference works, published sources, studies and monographs which, in addition to their own research, aid the research workers in examining the historic role of the working class and the Party in every period of our modern and contemporary history. As a result of almost twenty-five years of research, we now have adequate information on the evolution of our working-class movement, on its role and organizational strength at various periods. A thorough analysis has been made of

the international and domestic conditions for the emergence of the Hungarian socialist movement and of the struggle of the Hungarian workers for the creation of a socialist workers' party. There has been successful exploration in practically all details of the foundation of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary; the influence of the Second International on the development of the Hungarian working-class movement; the process of the Social Democratic Party's development into a mass party; the initiation of the Hungarian trade-union movement; the relationship of the social democrats to the agrarian socialist movements.

Monographs of a high standard deal with the history of the political crisis of 1905–1906 and the years preceding the outbreak of the First World War and with the role and significance of the mass movements which had emerged in Hungary as a result of the first Russian revolution. Lately a series of original monographs has been devoted to the scientific analysis of one of the most important periods in modern Hungarian history, that of the 1918–1919 revolution. Detailed research has revealed the movements that unfolded in the wake of the Russian Socialist Revolution and the ideological, political and organizational conditions for, and the objective inevitability of, the formation of the Hungarian Party of Communists. A significant achievement that will in all likelihood, stand the test of time is the scientific definition of the character, historic role, results and limitations of the 1918 bourgeois democratic revolution. A major monograph on this subject deals with the various aspects of the outcome of this revolution; with the establishing of bourgeois democratic conditions; with the achievement of national independence; with the proclamation of the Republic. At the same time, relying on a wealth of concrete facts, it proves that it was no longer possible in 1918–1919 to solve the problems of Hungarian social progress within the confines of bourgeois democracy.

The historic need for founding a new type of workers' party must be seen in this context. Once the earlier one-sidedness had been overcome, it became possible to show how the new party was related to the old one, what role the social democratic Left and the various revolutionary socialist groups played in the formation of the party, what was qualitatively new in the birth of the Hungarian Party of Communists and what ideas the Hungarian communists, Béla Kun and his colleagues who had returned from Russia, brought with them from their Bolshevik experience. A theoretical generalization of this group of problems was made possible by a number of studies and published sources which provided ample and convincing documentation of the history of the movement of some one hundred thousand Hungarian prisoners of war in Russia, their incipient communist organizations there, and the role of the Hungarian internationalists in the Great October Socialist Revolution and the civil war.

Naturally, in the course of this work a stand had to be taken against earlier, insufficiently grounded evaluations. Considerable circumspection was required for the scientific correction of the unhistorical and harsh appraisal of the social democratic movement and, in connection with this question, for a scientific criticism of attempts to rehabilitate reformism as well.

Research into the 1918–1919 period proved the organic connection of the two revolutions, showed the process by which the bourgeois democratic revolution developed into a socialist revolution, the inevitability of the socialist revolution's victory and the historical conditions for it. Recent works dealing with this period

already illuminate the ideological features of the contemporary communist and social democratic movements and the characteristics and main trends of the ideological development of the two parties.

Noteworthy works of the history of the Hungarian Republic of Councils prove with a multitude of facts and scientific conclusions derived from them, that the establishment of the first Hungarian workers' power was the organic consequence of internal social developments and at the same time the result of the upswing in the international revolutionary movement which began in October 1917. A thorough research into this problem extended to an examination of such important questions of principle as the general and specific conditions of the socialist revolution and socialist construction; the relationship between national interests, patriotism and internationalism; the interpretation of the Party's role in Hungarian society; the problem of the relationship between the working class and other classes and social strata in the revolutionary period; the basic principles of the agrarian, social and cultural policies of the Republic of Councils and their practical results and contradictions.

Events in 1918–1919 in Hungary had important lessons to offer not only for the Hungarian, but also for the international working-class movement, contributing toward its ideological development. Monographs on this period reveal these interconnections, though much has still to be done in this field, particularly as regards intensive research into the historical relations between the Hungarian working-class movement and those of neighbouring countries. It has been clarified once and for all and there is a general consensus on this among Hungarian historians, that the first Hungarian proletarian revolution was overthrown by the joint action of overwhelming international forces and international counter-revolution supported by the Allied powers. This fact naturally greatly influenced the subsequent development of political and economic life and the power structure of Hungarian society.

The scientific study of the 1919–1944 period has also made considerable progress. Because of the complexity of this period's history and the multitude of theoretical and historical problems inherent in it, Hungarian historians have primarily concerned themselves with the key periods. Accordingly, monographs have been written on the reorganization of the illegal communist movement, on the Socialist Workers' Party of Hungary (MSzMP) which operated semi-legally between 1925 and 1928, on the working-class movements at the time of the great world economic crisis, on the history of the Hungarian resistance movement during the Second World War as well as on the problems of the anti-fascist united front. Their common feature is that the history of the Hungarian Party of Communists is treated not in isolation from but in close connection with the development of the whole Hungarian working-class movement, of Hungarian society, bearing in mind the international context. Close attention is paid by these works to the development of the political line of the Communist International and its influence on the activities of the Hungarian Party of Communists which was one of its founding members and one of its sections. Monographs dealing with the period between the two world wars describe the specific features of the Hungarian working-class movement, including the important fact that two workers' parties operated throughout this whole period. These were the illegal revolutionary party of the workers (KMP) and the oppositionist Social Democratic Party (SzDP)

which embraced relatively large masses of working people and was militant as to its mass base but was predominantly reformist as to leadership. However, the Left also continuously asserted its influence in it, though to a varying extent in various periods.

The serious contradictions which arose from this process of development and from the presence and activity of the two parties hindered the progress of the movement. The later rapprochement and cooperation between the left-wing social democrats and the illegal communist movement, belated though it was, nevertheless provided substantial impetus to the extension of the working-class movements' scope of influence. Works published on this period make it clear that organizational strength cannot be the sole criterion by which to judge the social impact and role of the Communist Party, which at that time had been forced into illegality. And one must guard against passing summary judgement on the role and activities of the social democratic movement even though it had a right-wing leadership throughout the whole period. The legal Social Democratic Party must be considered a workers' party as regards its base, one which, during the whole period of the Horthy regime, was the best organized legal opposition to the counter-revolutionary fascist system. The picture drawn by our research workers gives a complex view of the finer shades of centrist and left-wing trends within social democracy as well.

The communist movement endured throughout the twenty-five years of the counter-revolutionary regime and despite the severe spilling of blood, it repeatedly recovered. It was the only force in Hungary which was able to provide the correct answer to the major problems of the country's social development. While it is true that the Party's voice reached comparatively few directly, nevertheless, by utilizing legal opportunities as well, it was always able to influence the development of Hungarian society. The dialectical approach has now become dominant in the historical evaluation of the communist movement as well. Accordingly, it has been clearly shown that the formation and existence of the Hungarian Party of Communists (KMP) brought a new quality to the Hungarian working-class movement and signified a break with the movement's opportunist trends. All the same, continuity cannot be disregarded; the KMP was the most consistent upholder of all the revolutionary traditions which Hungarian progress and the socialist movement had accumulated, traditions which carried on and transcended at the same time.

Works treating the period of the Second World War give a realistic picture of the role of the working-class movement in those critical years. They analyze the collapse of the Horthy regime, the theoretical and political development of the communist movement and the international aspects of this process. The authors of these works have shown that following the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, the political line of the KMP was modified, though this was not without contradictions, and the Party then began its struggle for the creation of an anti-fascist united front. Research has proved that despite the objective and subjective difficulties, the Hungarian resistance movement played an important part during the final period of the war. Although this movement could not turn into a general armed uprising, it had a substantial role in weakening the positions of German and Hungarian fascism in Hungary as well as in saving at least part of the country's material wealth.

Among the most significant achievements of our historiography are those accomplished by research into the revolutionary changes and development after the Liberation, that is, the examination of the current historical period, a task of outstanding ideological and political importance. Understandably, research in this period has concentrated on the years between 1945–1948. First of all, the historic turn of events that occurred in the last months of 1944 and the beginning of 1945 has been outlined, including the historical significance of the activity of the proletariat and its revolutionary movement in the rapid restoration of the war-damaged economy, in bringing order to the disarranged social relations, in normalizing life and in ensuring the conditions for the development of the people's democracy. Concrete research provided a sound basis for a realistic appraisal of this period. A monograph has been published on a question that has been a subject of debates for many years, i. e., the sphere of problems concerning the nature, stages and peculiarities of the revolution. Works, which will in all likelihood stand the test of time, analyze the land reform, the transformation of the class structure of the peasantry and the agrarian development in the people's democracy. Studies on the mass movements and political struggles shed light on the gradualness of the revolutionary transformation between the autumn of 1944 and the summer of 1948; on the peculiar admixture of democratic and socialist elements, and the process of the gradual winning over of the masses and of the acquisition of power. The appraisal of the popular democratic form of transition and the elaboration of the history of the coalition government represent an important stage in research from the point of view of political history.¹

Works treating this period show the place and role of the national committees, of the factory committees and mass movements in the advance of the revolutionary process. They explain how the Hungarian Communist Party (MKP) set its economic policy, how it developed the conditions and method for the conversion to a planned economy. They deal with the facts, theoretical basis and practical results of the transformation taking place in all fields of the economy, which were unprecedented achievements even when judged by international standards. One particular monograph describes the role of the trade-union movement in creating working class unity and proletarian power.

After thorough research and a great many debates historians have come to the conclusion that the whole period of Hungarian development between 1945 and 1948 has to be viewed as a specific form of revolutionary transformation to a people's democracy. This process cannot be rigidly divided into a democratic and a socialist period. It was not a succession of two revolutions but a peaceful road leading to the victory of socialism in the course of which the elements of the democratic and the socialist revolution merged right from the start, and from the second half of 1945 the gradual forging ahead of the socialist elements was clearly discernible. Power took the form of a revolutionary democratic dictatorship by

¹ Research into contemporary history has certain specific methodological problems. One of these is the relationship of party history to general history. This relationship does not remain unchanged all the time. For example, amidst the new social conditions, the connection between party history and national history is clearly far more extensive than before. From the moment the working class became the leading force in the state, the relationship between party history and national history assumed a qualitatively new form and no dividing wall can be erected between the two.

the working class and the peasantry, thus ensuring the gradual transformation of the people's democracy into the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Scientific research – the results of which appeared chiefly in the form of collections of studies – extended beyond the first period, that is, beyond the turn of events which occurred in 1947. An important volume deals with the party's alliance policy between 1936 and 1962. Several original works have been published on the history of the 1956 autumn counter-revolution and its internal and external causes. A dissertation has been written on the history of the reorganization of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) and on its shaping of a scientifically grounded political line. Work done so far suggests that the time is ripe for a monograph to be written on the period of the laying of the foundations of socialism. Such a work could now rely, in addition to the works mentioned, on a number of scientific analyses, studies and published sources dealing with social, economic and agrarian changes since 1957.

The series of sources published in the past twenty-five years have played a very important role. They include more than twenty volumes incorporating the most important documents of the working class movement from its inception up to the present time. They represent an indispensable standard aid for historians.

The achievements of a quarter century's work made possible the publication of a large-scale synthesis, "A magyar forradalmi munkásmozgalom története 1848–1962" (The History of the Hungarian Revolutionary Working-Class Movement from 1848 to 1962). This provides a guide to the more than a century long history of the Hungarian working class movement, relying not only on new research but also on a large number of earlier publications. The publication of the new synthetic work on Party history has lent a new impetus to the study, teaching and popularization of the working-class movement's history. Its wealth of material, its scientific analysis of historical processes, its principled standpoint on many controversial questions all greatly contribute toward a proper appraisal of the true role of the Hungarian working-class movement in modern history. The choice of title, "The History of the Hungarian Revolutionary Working-Class Movement", was not arbitrary. It expressed a position on a question of principle, namely, that we regard the Hungarian working-class movement as an integral whole which, in its complex and contradiction-ridden history of more than one hundred years, has consistently proved itself to be the most progressive element of Hungarian society.

The work so far accomplished and the publication of the synthesis of Party history does not mean that we consider our work finished. There is a considerable hiatus regarding the history of the Hungarian social democratic movement, the detailed study of which has started only recently. A series of monographs on the history of the Hungarian trade-union movement will be completed in the near future, and work on another group of topics on which research has fallen behind, the study of the structure of Hungarian society, especially that of the working class, and the ideological and cultural history of the working-class movement, has also begun. Nevertheless, one can say that a Marxist survey of the history of the working-class movement in the modern age, up to the present, is available in broad outline and the criticism and correction of the distortions of bourgeois historiography has in the main been completed. Progress has been made in the research of previously unexplored historical questions and periods and this explo-

ration is being extended to include the present period. In the course of this work the social relevance and influence of Hungarian historiography has greatly increased, the requirement of an international outlook has been more forcefully asserted, and work is progressing in the examination of the historical relationship between the Hungarian and the international movement.

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The present collection of papers, covering the history of the Hungarian working-class movement, aims to meet an international demand that has been present for a considerable time. This may be the first opportunity for English speaking readers to familiarize themselves with the main outlines of the more than a century-old history of the Hungarian workers' movement. Though this volume is not a synthesis but a collection of studies, the aim is nonetheless to present a comprehensive picture of the history of the Hungarian revolutionary working-class movement. To achieve this, the studies selected cover every important stage in the history of the Hungarian workers' movement in a chronological order, but, beyond this, their authors focus their attention on the key issues of the period they discuss.

Naturally, the limits of space are evident when more than one hundred years' history is treated in a single volume. The studies of the different historical periods are organically linked. They show the laws of development of the Hungarian working-class movement and those social and political conditions in which the movement was active from the last third of the 19th century when the young Hungarian working class created its own movement and class organizations.

The studies in this volume are not of uniform structure or form. Some, which seek to depict a longer historical period are chronological in structure, others follow a thematic approach and still others, mainly those concerned with the history of ideas, seek to outline the focal points of the ideological development of a particular period.

Different as their methodology may be, they are alike in their basic outlook though each study is individual in approach and method. This is evidenced at times in the shades of difference in the judgement of certain events. We had no wish to eliminate these differences, nor the individuality of style or structure. All the authors of this volume are Marxist historians, they are firmly grounded in the principles of historical materialism and in their work they apply Marxist-Leninist dialectical methods and view of history. Another common feature of the studies is that they do not hesitate to discuss questions which were thought to be "embarrassing" at one time. They are based on genuine sources and facts available to their authors and all endeavour to present an authentic picture of the things as they were and as they are.

The first study deals with the birth of the socialist working-class movement in Hungary and its ideological and organizational development. It discusses in detail the birth of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary as well as the national and international conditions of its development. The study that follows shows the social democratic movement in Hungary already as a mass movement. It describes the theory and programme of the Social Democratic Party, its peculiar relationship to the trade unions and the emergence and activity of its inner opposition.

The questions it discusses include the role of the Social Democratic Party in Hungarian social and political life and its attitude towards the problems of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

These studies cover a fairly long period within a limited space. Their authors therefore had to refrain from treating and analyzing problems which, though typical of the period, were not absolutely essential to a proper understanding of the subject. The general political history of the period of the dualistic Austro-Hungarian Monarchy is therefore only outlined to the extent necessary for such an understanding. Nor could the economic development of the country, the political system or characteristic features of the individual governments be dealt with in detail. The authors could not extend their analyses to the role of the non-socialist groups and trends within the working-class movement, not even to such milestones in the political and economic struggle of the Hungarian proletariat as the 1905-1906 political crisis. The great suffrage struggles of the 1910s are merely touched upon by way of illustration.

A separate study deals with the founding of the Hungarian Party of Communists (KMP). We thought it important to familiarize the readers abroad with the working-class roots of the forces which founded the Communist Party, and the organizational and ideological influence which the Russian Bolshevik Party, the German Spartacus movement, the German Independent Socialists, social democracy and bourgeois radical trends had on the left-wing groups that formed the Party. The study makes it clear that the birth of the Communist Party was deeply rooted in the past of the Hungarian working-class movement, but that its foundation had also been connected with the revival and influence of the international revolutionary working-class movement.

The study on the history of the Hungarian Republic of Councils outlines the place and importance in Hungarian history of the proletarian revolution, describing the historical antecedents of its formation and its effect on the working-class movements of the neighbouring countries. Its subject, the national-minority problem, is still a topical theoretical and practical one in the international working-class movement. We therefore consider it important to show our readers abroad what the policy of the Hungarian proletariat had been in this sphere.

The authors of these two studies could not undertake to give equal stress to all events of national politics and the working-class movement. Numerous important questions such as the collapse of the Monarchy, the victory of the bourgeois revolution, the formation and crisis of the bourgeois-social democratic coalition government, the elemental force of the mass movements are barely referred to. We thought it more important within this limited space to show how the new revolutionary party related to its historical antecedents, why the birth of the revolutionary party brought a new quality to the Hungarian working-class movement and, in the objective revolutionary situation, what role the party played in bringing about the victory of the Republic of Councils. Likewise we were compelled to refrain from discussing many details of the history of the Republic of Councils; we chose to discuss instead the process of the victory of workers' power and the main events and problems in the development of the socialist state.

Between the two world wars, the Hungarian workers' movement found itself in a new situation, confronted with new tasks. The counter-revolutionary regime, which had replaced the overthrown Republic of Councils, was, in general, hostile

to the workers; their anti-working-class measures, however, did not evenly oppress the entire working-class movement. The Social Democratic Party functioned legally during the Horthy regime while the Hungarian Party of Communists was forced into complete illegality. This factor had a determining role in the Hungarian workers' movement.

The first study dealing with this period in this volume examines the characteristic features of the Hungarian communist movement in the twenties and the illegal Communist Party's analysis of the counter-revolutionary regime's political and ideological structure. Another study treats some of the important features and main characteristics of the Social Democratic Party's activity between the two world wars.

The theoretical questions discussed in the first study are all the more worthy of attention since the Communist Party was the first to be confronted with that new current in political reaction, fascism, which later also made its appearance in other European countries. It was an extremely difficult task to recognize and evaluate these new features in the conditions prevailing at the time. However, this work was indispensable to an understanding of the development of the Hungarian working-class movement and of the whole Hungarian society.

Another study appraises one of the basic features of the illegal Communist Party's policy: its internationalism. The Communist Party was characterized by a "dual inspiration" right from the start. It was firmly rooted in the country, but came into being and carried on its work as an integral part of the international communist movement. The Party's internationalism was always a determining element of the Hungarian communist movement. The importance of this factor has to be stressed since the ruling circles of the countries of the Danubian Basin consciously and continuously stoked the fires of national hatred, particularly in the quarter century following the First World War. It was the internationalist duty of the communist movement to fight this chauvinism, to expose its causes and to act consistently in the spirit of the mutual dependence of neighbouring peoples on each other.

In the 1930s, the fight against fascism was a central problem for the Hungarian working-class movement as well. It is understandable, therefore, that one study in this volume should be devoted to how the conditions in Hungary became ripe for this antifascist struggle, to the Communist Party's fight for a united front of anti-Hitler forces. This was a difficult period in the history of the Party. The previous strategy and tactics, valid for close to fifteen years, had to be reexamined in the light of the policy of the Communist International and, relying on the achievements of the earlier period, a new policy had to be worked out which would be able to rally the anti-German, anti-fascist forces of Hungary against the war and for national independence. The popular front policy of this period and the efforts to unite the two workers' parties pointed towards the future, anticipating the process of development of the people's democratic revolution between 1945 and 1948.

The third part of the volume reviews the most important historical questions of the 1945-1966 period. We attempted, as far as space allowed, to show above all the principal features of internal social and political relations and struggles: that fight which the Hungarian communists waged in new circumstances for winning

the working masses and for the cooperation of all sections of society to create the conditions for, and accomplish, a radical social transformation.

The first study on this period shows how the relationship between the classes and parties developed and gives an insight into the political struggles vital to the completion of the people's democratic revolution. Hungarian historiography, based on extensive research, has convincingly proved that the people's democratic revolution, and later the victory of workers' power in Hungary, were accomplished under the guidance of the Communist Party and with the active participation of hundreds of thousands of working people. Only brief mention could be made in the study of the various people's committees (committees to distribute the land, national committees, factory committees, etc.), trade unions and other social organizations that had an important part in paving the road for the victory of workers' power and in ensuring the active participation of the workers and peasants. A detailed account of their work requires several individual studies.

A new stage in the history of the post-1945 period began in 1948 when the two workers' parties merged into a unified Marxist-Leninist workers' party. The workers' power proved victorious and the new conditions for the further development of the socialist revolution were created. Though the historical circumstances were in many respects very favourable, the 1949-1956 period in the development of the Hungarian People's Democracy was one of severe contradictions. The study dealing with this period analyzes the class structure of the Hungarian society, it reveals the economic, political and social roots of the errors which were committed in the field of alliance policy and those trends which had a fundamental role in the outbreak of the 1956 counter-revolution. The study shows that these mistakes were rooted in the inconsistent application of the universally valid Marxist-Leninist teachings and connected with the incorrect interpretation or neglect of tasks arising from internal conditions and national peculiarities. It points out that the distortions of this period were not inevitable but can be explained exclusively or to a decisive degree, by subjective factors.

A separate study draws a general outline of the path taken by the socialist reorganization of agriculture. No attempt could be made to give a complete picture of this complex problem but only to sketch the main features and the social, economic and political factors of the massive reorganization which took place between December 1958 and the summer of 1961. Because of the favourable objective and subjective situation, large-scale socialist farming in Hungary was established so rapidly and in such a special manner that this revolutionary process drew international interest as well. This study cannot fully satisfy this interest, but it does make more perceptible the impact of large-scale farming in the development of Hungarian society by outlining the socio-historical conditions, the rate and methods of this transformation.

In the course of development between 1956 and 1966 the consistent Marxist policy of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party which boldly faced up to past mistakes, and its theoretical stand and practical struggle for the economic and political consolidation following the defeat of the counter-revolution, enriched the Hungarian and, to a more modest extent, the international working-class movement with valuable experience. The closing study describes the process of consolidation, stabilization and development of socialist state power, the creation of the material and technological base of socialism, the progress of the scientific

and cultural revolution, the introduction of the new system of economic management, placing them all in their historical context. Relying on the earlier achievements in the building of socialism, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party with the effective assistance of the international working-class movement and the socialist countries, successfully overcame the previous distortions in the Hungarian economy and society and simultaneously opened up a realistic and encouraging perspective of social development.

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An informative bibliography and index complete this volume of studies. In compiling this select bibliography we tried to inform our readers about the more important publications dealing with the subjects and periods discussed in this volume. This bibliography of a limited scope indicates the richness of the literature already available on the various periods in the history of the Hungarian working-class movement, and at the same time it gives an idea of the extent to which the authors here represented contributed to the accumulation of this wealth of scientific work.

We offer this volume to the reader in the hope that we have succeeded at least in approaching our original aim of surveying the history of the Hungarian working-class movement, its main lines of development and the role it has played in the history of our country and its people.

Henrik Vass

The workers of Hungary also sent a delegate to the Eighth Congress of the International Working Men's Association in Hungary. Károly Parkas supported Marx and Engels on the basic issues of the congress. He returned home firmly determined to concentrate his energies on the organization of a socialist party. In the late 1870s, when consideration was being given to the formation of a workers' party, the proletariat class in Hungary was still in its formative stage. Though the bourgeois revolution and fight for independence in 1848-1849 made considerable economic and industrial development and progress in the two decades of Hungarian absolutism (1849-1867) following the defeat of the revolution.

The Struggle for the First Independent Proletarian Party

The First Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary (1868–1890)

by

Edit S. Vincze

The violent suppression of the Paris Commune ushered in a new era in Europe; the epoch of revolutions came to an end and a relatively peaceful period of capitalist development set in. In 1913 Lenin summarized the features of the socialist workers' movements in the decades from 1871 to the turn of the century in the following words: "Socialist parties, basically proletarian, were formed everywhere and learned to make use of bourgeois parliamentarism and to establish their own daily press, their educational institutions, their trade unions and their co-operative societies. The Marxian doctrine gained a complete victory and spread. The process of selection and accumulation of the forces of the proletariat and the preparation of the proletariat for the impending battles made slow but steady progress."¹

At the turn of the seventies heated debates broke out in the international working-class movement on how to define the main tasks and tendencies of the period following the Paris Commune. However, the majority of the socialists of the Eastern and Central European countries accepted the views of Marx and Engels that for the time being there was no longer a revolutionary situation in Europe and that the proletariat had to prepare for a longer series of partial economic and political struggles in order to overthrow capitalist society. The main tasks had been summed up in the statutes accepted at the Hague Congress of the First International in 1872, to the effect that "the working class can only take a stand against the united power of the capitalist classes if it is organized as a political party distinct from all former parties of the wealthy classes and is prepared to oppose them."²

The socialists of Hungary also sent a delegate to the Hague Congress of the International, Károly Farkas, an engineer and the chief representative of the International Working Men's Association in Hungary. Károly Farkas supported Marx and Engels on the basic issues of the congress. He returned home firmly determined to concentrate his energies on the organization of a socialist party.

In the late sixties, when consideration was being given to the formation of a socialist party, the proletarian class in Hungary was still in its formative stage. Though the bourgeois revolution and fight for independence in 1848–1849 made capitalism dominant, and industrial development did not stagnate in the two decades of Habsburg absolutism (1849–1867) following the defeat of the revolution

¹ Lenin, V.I.: *Marx, Engels, Marxism*, p. 86, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1951.

² Cf. Marx, K. and Engels, F.: *Művei* (Works), vol. 17, p. 388, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1968.

and the War of Independence, the industrial revolution in Hungary was only completed in the last third of the century.

It was the *Ausgleich*, the compromise of 1867, which created more favourable conditions for accelerating capitalist industrial development. In 1867 it was the aristocracy and the gentry who came to terms with the Habsburg-dynasty, with the Austrian large landowning class and the big bourgeoisie. The multi-national Habsburg Empire, formerly under the central political and administrative control of Vienna, became the dualist Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Political power over Hungary reverted to the Hungarian ruling classes and they were given a free hand to oppress and exploit the Hungarian working people as well as the national minorities living within its borders and constituting more than one half of the population: Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Ruthenians, Rumanians, South-Slavs, Germans and Italians. The Hungarian ruling circles had relinquished such important elements of Hungarian sovereignty as the independence of foreign policy, the army and the monetary system. However, they retained the privileges acquired in the period of feudalism, above all the enormous landed estates and their monopoly on political life, based on the possession of land.

The peculiarities of the capitalist development in Hungary were determined by the place Hungary occupied in the multi-national Monarchy, by its simultaneous domination over the smaller nations, and dependence on Austria and the survival of the remnants of feudalism.

Following the *Ausgleich* – in the more favourable atmosphere of political consolidation – there was a revival of economic life and the capitalist entrepreneurs were caught up in a frenzy of new undertakings. It was particularly the communication network, the iron industry, mining, and the building industry which made considerable strides forward, side by side with the traditional food-industry of Hungary: milling, sugar and distilling industries. In the period between 1867 and 1873 the production of industrial basic materials increased considerably. (The production of coal rose from 0.7 million tons to 1.64 million tons.) In the same period some four thousand kilometres of railway lines were built.

The Austro-Hungarian customs union – apart from many positive features – set limits to the manysided, proportionate and even development of Hungarian trade. Thus the development of the textile industry stagnated and the above-mentioned industrial branches constituted the bulk of large industry. Even at the turn of the century, small and medium industry predominated over the large machine industry. The rate of industrial development had been hampered by an economic crisis in 1873; at that time and in the period of stagnation following the crisis industrial development had slowed down and regained momentum only during the late eighties. Even at the turn of the century, Hungary was still an agrarian country and its population was composed primarily of peasants.

The emergence and strengthening of the industrial proletariat paralleled the rate of industrial development. In the period between 1867–1873 the working-class population increased to 360,000; however, it made up little more than two per cent of the country's population of fifteen million. The number of factory workers – some 70,000 – was particularly low, barely one-fifth of the industrial workers. This specific feature may be accounted for by the one-sided development of industry: in Hungary the rapidly developing branches of industry (iron, machine and food industries) employed but a small number of workers. In addi-

tion to the large number of workers in small-scale industry, the characteristic feature of the Hungarian proletariat was its multi-national composition. The heterogeneous ethnic groups appeared particularly in the capital, since even at the end of the century the bulk of the population was German in Budapest, and in the mining districts near the borders of the country where Slovak, Rumanian, Serbian and German workers were in the majority.

Attempts to Establish a Workers' Party in Hungary in the Late Sixties

In September 1872 – when Károly Farkas returned from The Hague – the idea of establishing an independent political workers' party was no longer novel to the workers' movement in Hungary. In the spring of 1868 the socialists of Austria had begun to make preparations for the formation of a social democratic party. The ninth Workers' Congress held in Vienna on August 30, 1868 adopted a social democratic programme which – based on the teachings of Ferdinand Lassalle – urged the formation of a "free people's state", the foundation of producing-societies and demanded civil liberties for the working class. In the autumn of 1868, "social democratic committees" had been formed in Austria and Hungary to prepare for the formation of the party. However, the authorities in Austria banned the Vienna committee, took legal action against its members and as a consequence, the committee in Hungary also ceased to function.

New impetus had been provided for the organization of a party in August 1869, by the formation of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany. Shortly after its foundation at the Eisenach Congress, the first public meeting of workers in Pest was held on August 22, 1869. It accepted the resolutions of the Vienna workers' congress of August 30, 1868 as the programme of the "social democratic party". (The text was complemented with some parts of the Eisenach programme.)

Following the formation of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany, the socialists of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy began to increasingly regard this party as their model. At an illegal conference in Pozsony, in November 1869, the socialists of Austria-Hungary had resolved to adopt the ideas of the Eisenach party.

Just as there was a division within the German socialists, when the Eisenach Party was founded in the autumn of 1869, the organized workers of Hungary had also been split into two camps, forming two socialist societies. The General Workers' Society (ÁME), formed in February 1868, professed the teachings of Ferdinand Lassalle. Among its founders was János Hrabje, a carpenter and formerly the Hungarian member of the General-Council of the First International, and Antal Ihrlinger, a German printer, born in Sopron, Hungary, who was introduced to socialist ideas during his visits to Austria. The first Hungarian socialist organization accepted, from the very start, the idea of proletarian internationalism, and sought to win the multi-national proletariat of Hungary without discrimination as to nationality.

The other organization, the Workers' Educational Society of Pest-Buda (PBME) had been formed in August, 1869, under bourgeois sponsorship. However, a good many workers in its ranks interpreted the term "self-help", as class-

struggle, as the independent organization of the workers. This group was not satisfied with the Lassallean programme of the ÁME which concentrated on winning political rights – universal suffrage with secret ballot, freedom of association, of assembly and of the press – and demanded action for improving the economic situation of the proletariat as well.

It was mainly due to Károly Farkas that the PBME soon rid itself of the bourgeois sponsors and became a socialist organisation. On returning from his visit to Switzerland in 1868, Károly Farkas first began to work at Temesvár where he formed a section of the International. In January 1869 he was appointed chief representative of the International in Hungary. In the summer of the same year he moved to the capital where he joined and shortly after became a leader of the PBME. He used this position to disseminate widely the ideas of the International Working Men's Association and to win supporters for the International, not only in the PBME but in the ÁME as well.

In the autumn of 1869 the socialists of Hungary, similarly to the Eisenach party, considered the union of the two central workers' societies and of those of the larger industrial centres of the country as one of the main preconditions of the formation of the social-democrat party.

In the spring of 1870 the central organizations began to cooperate more closely. The ÁME as well as the PBME, supported the first Hungarian socialist workers' paper, the *Általános Munkás Ujság* and its German language counterpart, the *Allgemeine Arbeiter-Zeitung*. Both papers urged the formation of a socialist party. The leadership of the ÁME started a campaign in the autumn of 1870 for the centralization of the organizations in the provinces. Most of them agreed to this and contributed to the support of the centre in the capital. However, the merger of the two workers' societies of Pest was postponed. Following several attempts at mergers and repeated splits, conditions for the establishment of a party were unfavourable until May 1871.

The merger, and the formation of the social democratic party had been delayed by the different views which had emerged in both centres of the Hungarian working-class movement. Although those who had professed Lassallean views and the members of the International all regarded the Eisenach Party as the model for the new party, nevertheless, they were at variance as to the character and organizational form the Hungarian workers party should take.

The Eisenach party had been established at a time when the solution of the national question and the democratic unification of the country was the main endeavour of the progressive forces of Germany. The type and organizational form of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany had unambiguously been determined by the desire to demonstrate that the socialist working-class was the most consistent protagonist of the struggle for national interests and social progress. The organization which had been formed within the national framework, which had ties with the International and rallied the Austrian German proletariat, was in complete accord with this desire.³

³ Austrian socialists also joined the Eisenach party – to protest against Austria's exclusion from the German Federation (1866), demonstrating for the establishment of a united democratic Germany which would also include Austria.

However, the example of the German and Austrian socialists could not be followed identically in Hungary. Hungary, unlike Germany, was not an independent state: The *Ausgleich* of 1867 had compelled it to exist for a long time within the framework of the dualist system. It was not even a national state; the majority of the population were Germans, Hungarians, Slovaks and Southern-Slavs. As a result of the state relations with Austria and the multi-national character of the country it was not easy to find the best organizational form for the Hungarian socialist party.

In 1869–1870 the members of the International, the socialists gathering around Károly Farkas, had tried to solve the problem by establishing the Hungarian section of the International. Károly Farkas, in his letter of February 1870 to Johann Philipp Becker, the head of the Geneva central section of the International, was pleased to report that the merger of the two workers' organizations was imminent and the open affiliation of the Hungarian socialist working class to the International, "by establishing a new section",⁴ would soon be on the agenda.

However, because of the differences which in the meantime had erupted between the two workers' societies, the Hungarian central section of the International could not be established at the time and only the PBME joined the International openly. Nevertheless, the plan was not abandoned. In June 1870, Viktor Külföldi, editor and publisher of the two aforementioned workers' papers, wrote Becker that "First of all we have to bring all larger workers' societies to a common denominator, divide them into trade societies and then organize them as a section of the International – this is what I believe and what I wish to achieve."⁵

The events of 1870–1871 had, however, modified the previous plans. The unification of Germany under Prussian leadership, the final exclusion of Austria from the German Empire and, last but not least, the high treason trial against the socialists of Vienna in June 1870, had shattered all hopes the socialists of Germany and Austria had of forming a party in common. In the spring of 1871, the socialists of Vienna had the idea of organizing a social democratic party to cover the entire Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, uniting all of the proletariat of Austria-Hungary and functioning as a section of the International.

In the spring of 1871 Károly Farkas and his group were also fighting for the formation of such a party in the belief that the necessary cooperation of the proletariat of the Monarchy could better be obtained within a common party organization than through independent, though cooperating, Austrian and Hungarian workers' parties.

In the spring of 1871 a group of Austrian socialists arrived in the Hungarian capital to prepare for the organization of a common party. According to the statement to the police made by Lajos Szvoboda, one of the leaders of the ÁME, the socialists of Vienna "... intended to lead the working-class movement in Hungary just like in the provinces of Austria and Vienna, as inspired by the

"Zur Geschichte der Internationalen Arbeiterassoziation", *Der Vorbote* (Geneva), February 1870, No. 2, pp. 27–28.

⁵ Institute of Marxism-Leninism, Moscow, Central Party-Archives (to be quoted below as IML, Moscow, ZPA), fond 21, op. 1, ed. hr. 172/1. The letter was originally in German.

Geneva centre of the International. Schaeftner, Kutill and Rüdts were sent here from Vienna expressly to put plans of this kind into practice."⁶

As a first step toward the establishment of such a party for the whole Monarchy, a so-called "trade-society department" was set up in May 1871, practically simultaneously in Vienna and Budapest, which gathered the representatives of the social democratic workers of all workers' organizations, trade societies, and of all larger factories and plants.

However, there were many opponents to the establishment of the common party among the Lassallean leaders of the ÁME. Zsigmond Politzer, a contributor to the socialist weeklies, Lajos Szvoboda, Antal Ihrlinger and others thought it more expedient to organize a "Hungarian workers' party" independent of Austria which would be extended to all of Hungary, even going beyond the country's border to the lower Danube.

The adherents of the independent "Hungarian workers' party" were not members of the International and did not identify themselves with its aspirations, but rather followed the democratic but nationalistic representatives of the most progressive bourgeois parliamentary opposition party, the "Party of 48'ers."⁷

The cooperation started in the spring of 1869 and became firm by 1870-1871. At the time of the Franco-Prussian war, the ÁME protested jointly with the members of the "Party of 48'ers" against the Prussian conquest, proclaiming its support for the French republic. This mutual struggle moved a few leaders of the ÁME to involve some democratic members of the "Party of 48'ers" in leading the workers' party. The support of the parliamentary opposition did not only mean protection against possible reprisals by the government but also could facilitate the extension of its influence to the peasantry which, because of the agrarian character of the country, was large in number and of great importance, but still far from the socialist workers' movement. Their efforts were justified and stimulated by the example of the Eisenach party and in 1869 the democratic members of the South-German People's Party joined the social democratic party. In his statement to the police, Lajos Szvoboda referred to the example of Johann Jakoby, a member of the People's Party who "deserted to the social democratic camp and identified himself completely with the social democratic party."⁸

The advocates of a "Hungarian workers' party" – no consistent socialists themselves – entertained illusions about the members of the "Party of 48'ers", overlooking their nationalistic views and taking their sympathetic attitude toward the workers to be socialist ideas. Their illusions about the parliamentary opposition were strikingly characterized by what Lajos Szvoboda told the police:

⁶ Archives of the City of Budapest. (To be quoted as FL.) Papers of the High Treason Trial of 1871-1872. Statement of Lajos Szvoboda, July 10, 1871, p. 57. Original language of the statement was German.

⁷ The "Party of 48'ers" (its earlier name: "Extreme Left") was founded in the sixties by the former leaders of the 1848-1849 bourgeois revolution and War of Independence, by Ignác Helfy, Dániel Irányi, Ernő Simonyi and others who in Hungary were followers of Lajos Kossuth, living in emigration. Its base was composed mainly of the landed gentry, landed peasantry and the progressive intelligentsia. It opposed the *Ausgleich* of 1867 and fought for the independence of the country and the assertion of the democratic ideas of the 1848 revolution. The majority of the party members had a nationalistic attitude towards the national minorities living in Hungary, and professed the supremacy of the Hungarians in the Danubian Basin.

⁸ Op. cit., p. 26.

"... prominent members of the 'Party of 48'ers', though displaying a specifically national attitude in politics, are internationally minded in other fields and they follow mainly socialist principles."⁹

However, there were positive and negative elements in the views of both opposing factions. The progressive feature of the internationalists was proletarian internationalism, an awareness and conscious acceptance of the tasks emerging from the multi-national character of the country, an independent proletarian policy and the waging of consistent class struggle. The advocates of a "Hungarian workers' party" tried to extend the mass base of the working-class movement to the democratic bourgeoisie and the peasantry rallied behind it. The attitude of the internationalist group inevitably led to its isolation from all of the trends of the bourgeoisie. The advocates of a "Hungarian workers' party", on the other hand – lacking firm political principles – allowed free play to bourgeois influence and to the nationalist views concealed behind the strivings for independence. In the spring of 1871 the differences between the two camps appeared to be irreconcilable.

The victory of the proletariat in March 1871, the Paris Commune, had a revolutionizing effect on the Hungarian working class as well. In April, mass strikes took place in the capital of Hungary and on May 8, there were clashes between the police and demonstrating workers demanding "bread and justice". Thus the Lassallean views of peaceful transformation and of political struggle conducted within legal bounds were gradually defeated and the socialists declared themselves for the acquisition of political power by revolutionary means.

In addition to the inspiring example of the Paris Commune, an important role in hastening this process was played by the Hungarian members of the International and particularly by Károly Farkas. In a statement to the police, Farkas said of his efforts: "The societies in Hungary were originally based on Lassallean principles but they were remodelled in the spirit of the social democratic party's policy. It is true that I was the one to reorganize the societies in the spirit of social democracy according to the directives given by the center of the International. This was partially accomplished by my getting some committee members of the ÁME, who were closely associated with me, to make such proposals at their society meetings which agreed with the principles of the centre. I always tried to influence the working-class movement of Hungary so that the views of the International would be asserted."¹⁰

As a result of the ideological-political development of the leaders and members of the ÁME, the two groups disputing the issues of the formation of the party drew closer to each other and the advocates of a "Hungarian workers' party" were pushed into the background. The members of the PBME, which had been officially dissolved and had since December 1870 been functioning illegally, joined the ÁME at the end of May, thus achieving the unity of the socialist workers. Preparation commenced immediately to organize the Hungarian section of the International, the social democratic party.

⁹ Op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁰ FL, papers of the High Treason-Trial of 1871-1872. Minutes of the statement of Károly Farkas. The original is in German.

Then, an unexpected obstacle came up, preventing the formation of the party. As part of an internationally coordinated retaliatory action of the European governments against the socialist working-class movement, the Hungarian government ordered the leaders of the socialist organizations to be arrested. In June 1871, Károly Farkas, chief representative of the International, András Essl, tailor, head of the ÁME, Antal Ihrlinger, printer, Viktor Külföldi, proof-reader, the deputy chairman of the ÁME, Zsigmond Politzer and Lajos Szvoboda university students, and twenty-two other trade society and workers' organization leaders were arrested. These men were charged with planning the forceful overthrow of the Monarchy, with preparing to introduce "communism" and as a result of these trumped-up charges they were put on trial for high treason. Although at the trial, which began on April 22, 1872, the charges had to be dismissed and the socialists had to be acquitted, the activities of the organizations had temporarily ceased due to the long absence of the leaders and the constant police persecution. However, after the acquittal, the accused leaders of the socialist movement started to reorganize the movement almost at once, even at the risk of renewed official atrocities.

In the autumn of 1872, after a forced interval of over a year, the organization of the party, however, could not be resumed where it had been left off in June 1871. After the defeat of the Paris Commune, governments all over Europe attempted to disrupt the cooperation between the workers of various countries, and prevent the sections of the International from carrying on their activities and organizing new sections. In November 1872, at the request of Chancellor Bismarck of Germany, government representatives of the European countries met to coordinate measures and guidelines for suppressing the socialist organizations and preventing the organization of national and international organizations as the most important task. The policy of the Hungarian government toward the working class conformed to the internationally set guidelines. This was proved by the failure of the attempt to reorganize the ÁME; the police banned the meeting of the society's general assembly which had been called for October 6, 1872. The socialists of Hungary had to realize that any attempt at legalizing organizational work on a national level would come up against the opposition of the government and that it was unrealistic to think of openly forming a section of the International, or of a common workers' party to embrace the whole territory of the Monarchy.

Thus, in the autumn of 1872, the controversy around the question of organizational form, which for years had set two main currents of the socialist workers' movement against each other, was resolved. By 1872 the principle of organization took shape, adapted to dualism and itself dualistic, according to which the proletariat of Hungary and Austria would form two separate, independent but related social democratic parties. Although the socialists of Austria at their 1874 illegal conference at Neudörfel again attempted to establish a federated social democratic party of the whole monarchy, their plan was thwarted by the government when those at the conference, and also the leaders of the planned provincial party organization were arrested.

The controversy on organizational questions was essentially resolved by changes in external conditions: first of all, the ascendancy of violence in the policy of the governments toward the working class which put insurmountable obstacles in the way of organizing internationally, or over a larger territory, and secondly, in

connection with this, the diminishing role of the International as a leading centre and finally, in 1876, the dissolution of the International Working Men's Association.

Although the situation favoured a party, which would be restricted to the territory of Hungary, it is nevertheless only a delusion that history has justified the advocates of a "Hungarian workers' party". Obviously, the establishment of a workers' party, which would have extended to the whole territory of the Monarchy, had proved unrealistic. But it had been no less unrealistic to plan the formation of a socialist workers' party in Hungary to include the representatives of the bourgeois opposition who were for independence and democracy. The differences of opinion on this question had also been decided by events. The Paris Commune forced, in a certain sense, the members of the "Party of 48'ers" to show their true colours. Although they had at times voiced their support for the socialist leaders charged with high treason, they simultaneously dissociated themselves from the revolutionary ideas of the Commune and labelled as "unpatriotic" the principle of proletarian internationalism, declaring socialist ideas unrealistic from the point of view of the whole socialist workers' movement. From the open declaration of their views it became clear that in the future the socialist workers' movement could only count on their temporary support and not on their "joining the socialist camp" — as Johann Jakoby had in Germany. Nevertheless, sympathy continued among the advocates of the "Hungarian workers' party" for the "Party of 48'ers" and its successor, the "Independence Party" (FP) and because of them an orientation toward the FP became a standard tendency of the socialist workers' movement in Hungary.

Struggle for the Formation of a Legal Workers' Party in the Seventies

The "Non-Voters Party"

In view of the fact that the Hungarian government did not permit the reorganization of the ÁME, which had legal statutes, Károly Farkas and other trial defendants — particularly Antal Ihrlinger, András Essl and Viktor Külföldi — once again tried to form a workers' party. Strange as it may seem, there was less opposition to the formation of a political party at that time than to a national workers' society. There was no law in Hungary prohibiting political parties.

As a first step, a socialist weekly was started which from January 5, 1873 appeared both in the Hungarian and German languages, called *Munkás Heti-Krónika* and *Arbeiter-Wochen-Chronik*. With the help of these party organs contact between the socialists of the capital and the provinces had soon been re-established, so that in March 1873 the preparatory committee concluded that it was timely to call a workers' conference in Budapest for the purpose of organizing a party.

The speeches at the public workers' conference on March 23 left no doubt that the workers' party was to be founded in the spirit of The Hague congress resolutions and that working-class militancy would govern party guidance and principles. András Essl and Károly Farkas — presenting the resolution on the formation of the party — stressed that "... despite the existence of 'right', 'left' and 'extreme

left' parties in the country, none among these represents the interests and demands of the working class which is all the more needed so that the working people as a class, as a party, may oppose all other parties which represent and further the interests of factory-owners, capitalists and other exploiters."¹¹

Antal Ihrlinger was elected chairman, Viktor Külföldi secretary of the Hungarian Workers' Party (MMP) and Károly Farkas and András Essl members of its leading body. After this formative meeting the leaders of the party began to prepare for the calling of the first Hungarian workers' congress. The task of this congress would have been to prepare and discuss the party programme – in the presence of the socialist workers' representatives from the provinces.

However, this never took place. Instructed by the Minister of the Interior, the police of Budapest ordered the party disbanded and banned its activities. The authorities justified this act on the grounds that the party had an elected leadership and a party press so that it was not really a party but a workers' society, which according to Hungarian law could function only after its statutes had been presented and approved.

However, the semi-legal leadership of the party and the editorial office of the party papers continued to function despite the ban. With the help of the party press the party, at the frequently held workers' conferences, urged the organization of the workers in the capital and provinces and the formation of trade societies; it established and maintained contacts with the workers' societies in the provinces, arranged party evenings and disseminated socialist ideas through the columns of its press. This work had become extremely difficult because the International ceased to function and as a result of the persecution the previously established international relations were severed so that the young Hungarian workers' movement found itself without the support of the proletarian movements of the more developed countries.

Early in 1876 the Austrian government extradited Leo Frankel, a Paris Commune participant, who had been arrested in Vienna. Since in France the prisoners had been granted amnesty, the Hungarian authorities were also obliged to release him.

Frankel, a well trained and experienced personality of the international working-class movement became the leader of the Hungarian movement. He was born in Obuda and spent his goldsmith apprentice years in Germany and France. While in Paris he became the organizer and leader of the German section of the International in Paris, later taking part in the struggle to establish the Paris Commune. In March 1871 he became a member of the Commune's leading body and later its Commissar of Labour and Commerce. After the defeat of the workers' power he fled from Paris and in the summer of 1871 settled down in London, where as an associate of Marx and Engels he worked in the General Council of the International as the corresponding secretary for Austro-Hungary.

¹¹ "A magyarországi munkáspárt újjászervezése" (Re-organization of the Hungarian Workers' Party), *Munkás Heti-Krónika* and *Arbeiter-Wochen-Chronik*, March 30, 1873. Published in the *Magyar Munkásmozgalom Történetének Válogatott Dokumentumai* (Selected Documents of the History of the Hungarian Working-class Movement), ed. by T. Erényi, vol. I, p. 265, Szikra, Budapest, 1951. (To be quoted as MMTVD.)

Following his release in the summer of 1876, Frankel at once associated himself with the socialists of Hungary and got acquainted with the difficulties of the movement. A letter to Marx on October 9, 1876 clearly shows that he did not agree with the submission of Károly Farkas and the other leaders of the socialist movement to the ban and to the semi-legal form of the organization. He formulated his opinion and aims thus: "I shall nonetheless try to form societies of whatever name and statutes and shall be no less a radical because of this."¹²

Leo Frankel soon became a member of the editorial board of the *Arbeiter-Wochen-Chronik*, first editing the paper together with Antal Ihrlinger and then by himself from February 1877. The party press became an important instrument of the dissemination of Marxist theory. Frankel's articles popularized the Marxian theory of class struggle, the conquest of political power and the idea of proletarian internationalism. The working-class press published many articles analyzing the main problems of political life.

Preparations for the organization of a legal workers' party were started in the second half of 1877. At the initiative of Leo Frankel, representatives of the Budapest socialists met on December 3, 1877 and decided to call the first Hungarian social democratic workers' conference. When the conference call was made public, the commissioner of police in Budapest summoned the signers of the call for interrogation. In January 1878 the Minister of the Interior issued a decree: the congress would not be allowed to be held on the grounds that "since no socialist society has been sanctioned in Hungary, a socialist conference cannot be allowed".¹³

Leo Frankel and his associates had thus been forced to seek to achieve their aims by round-about means. The opportunity was provided by the general election, which had been scheduled for the summer of 1878, to connect the establishment of a workers' party with the preparations for the elections. According to Hungarian law the government had no right to prevent the holding of election meetings and congresses. Therefore, the first workers' congress in Hungary was called under the name of the congress of the "non-enfranchised". The congress, however, instead of discussing and accepting a social democratic programme as had originally been planned could only concern itself with the fight for and achievement of universal suffrage.

The first workers' conference in Hungary to which the workers' organizations of Budapest sent seventy-nine delegates and twenty-five provincial towns another thirty, was held on April 21 and 22, 1878 under strict police surveillance. A resolution was passed on universal suffrage and a national petition-campaign and it was declared that at the coming general elections only those candidates shall be supported who pledge to speak for universal suffrage in Parliament. The congress also decreed the establishment of a "Non-Voters Party" (NVP). Since the law did not allow a political party to have a permanent elected leadership, the congress delegates asked the presidium to guide the party. This included Leo Frankel, Antal Ihrlinger and Dr. Zsigmond Csillag, a humanitarian who had only recently joined.

¹² Copy of original letter in German can be found in the Archives of the Institute for Party History of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, fond 676, bundle 1, unit No. 8.

¹³ OL., reserved papers of the Ministry of the Interior, 1877/1460, (1509). To be quoted as OL BM res.

Leo Frankel, in summing up the significance of the first Hungarian workers' congress and the formation of the party, said: "The congress did not and could not deal with the real socialist part of the programme because the government would not have tolerated it. However, the foundations of an organization had to be laid down and to this end advantage had to be taken of the first available opportunity; we had to show that we existed and that we were able to achieve this – under the very eyes of the police."¹⁴

The establishment of the NVP and its programme which concentrated on the struggle for universal suffrage were appropriate for rallying the skilled workers and those members of the proletariat who were already politically conscious. The suffrage law of 1848, modified in 1874, set a high financial and cultural status as a prerequisite for the right to vote, thus barring over ninety-four per cent of the country's adult population from voting and particularly the working class and the peasantry. In the mid 1870s not a single party took up the fight for the passage of a law on universal suffrage, nor would the most democratic opposition party, the FP, include it in its programme for fear that the extension of suffrage in multi-national Hungary would endanger the hegemony of the Hungarians. Thus only the socialists fought for universal suffrage, in the belief that the winning of their demand would initiate the full democratization of the country.

The political orientation of the socialist working-class movement made it necessary for the leaders of the NVP to make allies of those leading politicians in the FP who – opposed to the official programme of their party – were ready not only to voice their support for universal suffrage, but even for other democratic rights, such as legislation on the right of association, assembly and the freedom of the press.

As in 1870–1871, at the time of the Franco-Prussian war, the situation was also favourable in the late seventies for cooperation between the representatives of socialism and the democratic bourgeoisie. At the turn of the seventies and eighties, there were signs of revolutionary ferment in Germany and in Czarist Russia too. In retaliation for the attempts on the life of the German Kaiser, Wilhelm I, which reflected the dissatisfaction with imperial absolutism, the "exceptional" law against the socialists had been enacted in the autumn of 1878 at the proposal of Bismarck. However, the German proletariat soon overcame the confusion which followed the enactment of this legislation, organized its ranks and began to build an illegal network of party organizations. In 1878–1879, the smoldering contradictions and tensions of Russian society, too, came to the surface; the anarchistic movement of the *Narodovoltsi* became more intensive.

Leo Frankel and his socialist supporters hoped that the approaching Russian revolution would bring about a general and democratic development in all of Europe. They expected that the flames of a future revolutionary explosion in Russia would spread further so that not only the Czarist throne but also the power of Bismarck would collapse thus opening the way for a democratic development in Hungary, too.

The democratic minded representatives of the FP also sympathized with the revolutionary movements of Germany and particularly with those of Russia. They had hoped that the collapse of the Czarist power would create a favourable situa-

tion for the assertion of the desire for independence from Austria. The FP opposition's sympathy with the *Narodovolets* movement, based on their traditional anti-Russian, anti-German and nationalist strivings met, in 1878–1879, with the solidarity which linked the Hungarian social democratic movement with the revolutionaries fighting against absolutism and despotism.

In 1877–1878 the NVP and the left wing of the FP had jointly held a number of mass meetings demanding democratic rights and protesting against the aggressive war of the Monarchy aimed at acquiring the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina. These joint undertakings lent weight to the demands of the workers and helped the young socialist movement of Hungary to emerge from its isolation.

However, this obviously essential cooperation also had its drawbacks. At times the party leadership went too far in its concessions aimed at preserving the alliance and this narrowed the influence of the NVP among the organized workers. They yielded the editorship of the party's Hungarian language paper to Dániel Kászonyi, who was pro-independence. He was an enthusiastic participant in the 1848–1849 revolution and the fight for independence, who, though a humanist and supporter of social progress, was very far removed from socialist ideas and a proletarian class outlook. He often wrote articles which radiated nationalist prejudices and published them in the paper. The NVP had made other ideological concessions too, refraining from criticizing the nationalist attitude of the Independence Party and from taking a stand on the nationality question.

The fact that the political struggle had become the pivotal point of party activity meant that other aspects of the class struggle were neglected. The party leadership did not attribute due importance to the building up of the trade organizations of the working class and to organizing the workers of the provinces. Nor did it urge on the fight for the workers' demands despite the fact that as a result of the economic crisis, which began in 1873 and was continuing, the situation of the working class was deteriorating at the turn of the eighties. Production declined, many enterprises went bankrupt, unemployment increased and wages dropped. The working class insistently demanded an organized struggle to improve living conditions.

Aware of the mistakes and shortcomings of the leadership, the workers, who already at the time of the ÁME had disapproved of the organizations' preoccupation with the fight for winning political rights, its neglect of the economic struggle and the substituting for revolutionary class struggle concessions to the bourgeoisie, turned against the NVP. But even those workers had begun to oppose the party's policy who had earlier favoured the "Hungarian workers' party" and had been averse to the idea of proletarian internationalism. This group had a strong base in the General Workers' Society of Óbuda, which had been formed in the autumn of 1869.

This organization united mainly the workers of Hungarian origin of Óbuda, the North-Western district of the capital. Its leadership had accepted most of the basic socialist demands and their main endeavour was to draw into the movement those Hungarian workers who in their majority had not been organized. However, they tried to attain this praiseworthy aim by rousing nationalistic feeling against the large number of German workers who lived in Hungary and who played a significant role in socialist organizations.

¹⁴ *L'Égalité*, May 26, 1878.

The radical workers' opposition and the group under nationalistic influence – though at loggerheads with each other too – soon formed one camp. Victor Külföldi, Frankel's most consistent opponent, undertook to organize the opposition.

A few months after the establishment of the NVP, the opposition party, the Hungarian Workers' Party (MMP) was formed at a workers' congress on June 9 and 10, 1878. At the congress, mainly attended by the socialists of Budapest, no programme was adopted but the demands were indicated in a number of resolutions. Partly, these included civil liberties (abolition of birth and property privileges, universal suffrage with secret ballot, right of association and assembly, etc.) and partly demands of economic nature (ten-hour work day, minimum wages, equal wages for men and women, etc.).

The activity of the MMP ranged over the agitational and organizational work through the columns of *Népszava*, the extension of the trade-society movement and the calling of mass meetings. The party refrained from criticizing the government and often emphasized its respect for the law. Owing to this attitude, the NVP looked upon it as a government sponsored socialist party and treated its leaders as agents of the government and of the police.

The antagonism between the leaders of the two parties became increasingly acute. This situation which impeded the development of the socialist movement impelled the membership of the party to seek ways of agreement. On many basic questions there were no fundamental differences between the parties and both were willing to compromise. In January 1880 – after many interparty discussions – it was agreed that the NVP and the MMP should merge under the name of "social democratic party", that a conference be called and a programme and organizational statutes adopted. According to the agreement, the Hungarian language paper, *Népszava*, was to be the common party organ, succeeding the *Munkás Heti-Krónika* (from 1879, *Krónika*) and the *Arbeiter-Wochen-Chronik* was to remain the German language paper. Although the creation of the unity of the organized workers was basically useful, the mere fact that it had come about without the clarification of the differences in open debate carried within itself the possibility of another party split.

The General Workers' Party of Hungary

This second attempt by the socialist workers to legalize their party under the name of social democratic party once again came to nought in 1880. As in the spring of 1878, the Minister of the Interior would not allow the name "social democratic" to be used nor would he allow the congress to discuss and accept a programme. Thus at the unification congress on May 16, 1880, the party could be organized only as the "General Workers' Party of Hungary" (MÁMP). It was nevertheless a social democratic party; it was not of their own volition that the socialists had substituted an other term for "social democratic," which symbolized revolutionism and internationalism.

The programme of the MÁMP, which had been published in the press and then was accepted publicly at the Second Congress in 1881 reflected the development

of the international and national socialist working-class movement and its essential conclusions were based on the teachings of scientific socialism.¹⁵

The first point stated the necessity for the public ownership of land and the means of production, thus setting the establishment of a socialist society as the final aim of the working-class movement. The acceptance of the demand for public ownership, which had previously been adopted after long and sharp discussion at the 1868 Brussels and the 1869 Basel Congress of the First International, was an open declaration of war on capitalist private ownership, and a clear and unambiguous setting of the line of demarcation between bourgeois democracy and social democracy; at the same time it dissociated the party from the anarchists and Proudhonists in the working-class movement and from the other trends which defended private ownership.

The twenty points of the programme also included the political, economic and social demands of the socialist movement. The political ones included universal suffrage with secret ballot, right of association, assembly, and freedom of press, the liquidation of the standing army and the arming of people, the separation of State and Church, free education and administration of justice. Among the economic demands were the ten-hour work day, restrictions on Sunday and night work and measures to protect child and woman-labour. The welfare demands called for safety measures on the job, disability benefits and the further extension of social insurance.

The programme of the MÁMP made no mention of the Lassalleian demands, often criticized by Marx and Engels, but still included in the programme of the German Social Democratic Party that was accepted at the Gotha Congress in 1875. (Free people's state, producing societies supported by state credit.)

Despite the positive features of the programme, it bore the mark of the divergent groups which had merged to form the party. The fact that the preamble laid great stress on the legal aspects of the party, was partly to retain its legality in face of constantly growing government terror and partly a concession to those workers joining the united party who were opposed to illegal activity. It may be assumed that reference to proletarian internationalism – a criterion of socialist ideas – had been omitted from the programme out of consideration for the nationalist worker's opposition and for the cooperation with certain members of the FP. In contrast to the programme of the ÁME approved in August 1869, the 1880 programme did not proclaim the right to self-determination, nor did it deal with the nationality question.¹⁶

Once again the MÁMP could not elect a leadership – this function was, just as in 1878, seen to by the presidium of the conference – its legal activity, however, was permitted by the government. This had probably been motivated by the idea that a legally functioning party could much more easily be controlled and kept within bounds than one functioning secretly. (This conclusion may have been drawn from the experiences with the German "exceptional" law.)

¹⁵ For the programme, see *Népszava* and *Arbeiter-Wochen-Chronik*, May 23, 1880. (MMTVD, vol. 1, pp. 392–395.)

¹⁶ About this question the programme of the ÁME stated: "As far as the national minorities are concerned, the Social Democratic Party intends to resolve this question by the right of self-determination of the peoples." *Arany Trombita*, August 28, 1869. (MMTVD, vol. 1, p. 105.)

With the establishment of the party an old aspiration of the organized Hungarian workers had been realized and a legal, political, independent workers' party had been formed. This provided the possibility of solving the most immediate task, that of developing the party into a mass party able to guide the organization of partial struggles for the attainment of economic and political aims.

The congress was followed by an upsurge in the socialist workers' movement. In the spring of 1880 there were large-scale movements in the capital for higher wages, foremost among them the carpenters' strike which lasted for several weeks. Late in July there began the illegal formation of the inner, centralized organization of the MÁMP. The leadership issued membership cards and membership fees were acknowledged by party-dues stamps. The membership was organized into groups. Police reports show that "These are formed in groups of no more than ten individuals, each of which, after having met, has to form another group of ten members and this goes on without any member knowing from which group he originated."¹⁷

From amongst the group leaders a so-called "federal council" (party committee) was elected which guided and controlled the activities of the group leaders. The inner, centralized organization of the MÁMP was modelled on the Austrian and Geneva organizational forms.

The rapid development of the socialist workers' movement impelled the Ministry of the Interior to restrict the activities of the leaders of the socialist movement. One month after the congress at which the party had been established in June 1880, the residences of Leo Frankel and Antal Ihrlinger and the editorial premises of the party papers and other provincial organizations had been searched. However, this action brought no results; no documents were found on the grounds of which – in 1871 – legal proceedings could have been taken against the leaders of the MÁMP. The government authorities then resorted to a libel suit. In the autumn of 1880 legal action was taken against Leo Frankel, as editor of the *Arbeiter-Wochen-Chronik*, for publishing an anti-militarist leaflet which had been sent from London.¹⁸

Frankel was sentenced to two years' imprisonment and fined a large sum of money. He started his prison sentence in June 1881 and thus the socialist party was deprived of its most capable and most active leader.

During Frankel's imprisonment, the MÁMP was led by his immediate associates, Antal Ihrlinger, Zsigmond Csillag and Jakab Kürschner. The change of leadership took place at a time when the ranks of the Austrian and German working-class movements, most closely connected with the Hungarian, were disturbed by internal strife and the bourgeois governments were waging a fierce attack against the socialist organizations. To lead the party in this complicated situation required great skill, a firm theoretical position and at the same time flexible tactics.

During the late seventies and early eighties, as a result of the "exceptional" laws the German Social Democratic Party was split by fractions. The majority, led

¹⁷ OL BM res. 1880/396.

¹⁸ The leaflet in question – *An unsere Brüder in der Kaserne* – appeared in the paper of the "social revolutionaries," *Freiheit* on July 3, 1880. *Arbeiter-Wochen-Chronik* published the article with an introduction by Frankel, entitled "Druck erzeugt Gegendruck".

by August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht, was opposed by a group of "social-revolutionaries" led by Johann Most, an emigrant to London. His paper, "*Freiheit*", was read and circulated by many workers in Germany and in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, too.

In the early eighties a split came about in the Austrian workers' movement too, due to the sharpened struggle between the conciliatory "moderates," who insisted on the strict observance of the law, and the "radicals," who, like the German "social-revolutionaries", were demanding revolutionary methods. In the early eighties anarchist groups were also formed in Austria, mainly prompted and supported by the police; between 1882–1884 there had been a number of anarchist attempts at assassination. In January 1884 the Austrian government also introduced emergency legislation – modelled on the German one – in Vienna and its suburbs, and many radical socialists were expelled from the country.

The unity which was created in the Hungarian socialist working-class movement in January 1880, also proved unstable. The revolutionary workers, who had criticized the policy of the NVP from a radical position, began, as early as the autumn of 1880, to oppose the leaders of the MÁMP. From among the Hungarian "social-revolutionaries" Armin Práger, a tailor's journeyman, rose to prominence. He had earlier been active in Austrian socialist movement and had been expelled from the Austrian provinces in December 1880. There were also János Horváth, a shoemaker's assistant, and István Heckmann, a former defendant in the treason trial of 1871 and both had been leading personalities in Viktor Külföldi's party.

The differences became even more pronounced during 1881 and were intermingled with personal motives as well. In September, the central guiding body of the radical socialist opposition was set up, called the Executive Committee, which started *Der Socialist*, a weekly publication. Subsequently several radical papers appeared in the German language, such as *Der Kommunist*, and the *Volkswille*. In 1883 appeared the *Radikal* and the organization's paper in Hungarian, *Népakarat*, edited by the young shoemaker András Szalay.

The radical group had gradually built up its illegal organization, covering the capital with a network and maintaining active contact with the radical socialists of Austria. After the introduction of the Austrian emergency law, Budapest became the centre of the radical socialist organizations in the Monarchy. It was here that the radical paper of the Austrians, the *Zukunft*, was published, and leaflets were printed and smuggled into Austria as well.

The radical socialist opposition attracted the revolutionary workers who thought the tactics of the MÁMP too moderate and demanded the pursuance of a militant independent policy. This group was of the opinion that a socialist revolution was already approaching and that government terror could be brought to an end before long. The articles which appeared in the radical press, as well as the resolutions passed at the meetings, show that the Hungarian group of the paper *Freiheit* regarded the preparation for a socialist revolution as the sole task of the workers in the belief that any attempt aimed at reforming the political institutions of the capitalist social system was useless. "Our immediate 'programme' is to overthrow the present social system at all cost and replace it with a system of popular rule as demanded by the people", wrote *Népakarat*, "because as long as class-rule exists the people will suffer constant misery and be slaves to the regime;

an evil system based on greed and profit can be abolished only by revolution, by an 'international' people's revolution."¹⁹

While the group of radical socialists – in spite of their illusions and misconceptions – had kept revolutionary ideas alive, the MÁMP leadership, after the imprisonment of Frankel, followed ever more intensively the policy of the moderate Austrian socialists. Alarmed by the eventuality of emergency laws in Hungary too, the leaders of the party kept strictly within the "framework of the law" as dictated by the government. Their policy was characterized by the effort to render the socialist workers' movement acceptable to both the government and the Independence opposition. Early in 1884, at a meeting of the party leadership, Zsigmond Csillag summed up the basic principles of the party tactics to be followed, in these words: "... if the General Workers' Party of Hungary does not wish to lose everything in minutes then it must not come into open or in any way hostile conflict with certain concepts, with sympathies or antipathies and not even with certain mistakes and drivel which tyrannically dominate public opinion in Hungary. Every socialist in Hungary, even if holding entirely different views, must behave as a "good Hungarian, in body and soul".²⁰

According to Zsigmond Csillag this meant that a Hungarian socialist had to staunchly, in the nationalist spirit of the Independence Party, support the "Hungarian idea of state", that is, the supremacy of the Hungarians and support a war of revenge that was being prepared against Russia. This conformist tactic was tantamount to abandoning the fight against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology at a time when the main task was to organize the workers as an independent class. But it could also be used to drive a wedge between the nationalities and the Hungarian proletariat rather than promulgate the brotherly alliance between all oppressed classes living within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

While the party leadership tried to extend its base within the bourgeois opposition and among the Hungarian workers still under nationalist influence, they isolated themselves from the radical wing of the working-class movement, openly labelling it anarchistic, not at all minding that they were thus playing into the hands of the police.

It was the government that put an end to the activity of the radical socialist group. In March 1884, thirty-six radical socialists were arrested, among them András Szalay, who was carried off from his sick-bed, to die a few days later in the prison hospital. With the arrest of its leaders, the group dispersed, its members, however, – most of whom were forced to move to the provinces – continued to disseminate revolutionary ideas there.

During the eighties the MÁMP organized mass meetings, the most important of which were the protest-meetings against the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The leadership of the MÁMP launched a petition campaign against Sunday work, it petitioned parliament to legislate the ten-hour work day, factory accident insurance and industrial legislation, and they reiterated their demand for universal suffrage. However, the petition did not bring the desired result, because it lacked the influence and strength to support its activity with mass-movements.

¹⁹ "Programunk" (Our Programme), *Népakarat*, September 15, 1883.

²⁰ Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna Information-Bureau, 1884/619.

This political struggle nevertheless contributed toward the political education of the workers, and toward their recognition of the legal inequities and exploitation.

During the infrequent economic struggles of the eighties, a greater role was played by the workers of the large factories along with the workers employed in small and medium industries. The low level of organization, however, prevented the development of any mass strike-movement, which had, in any event, not been stimulated by the party leadership.

The relative stagnation of the socialist working-class movement in the late eighties, led to the organization of a new opposition group whose endeavours approximated those of Károly Farkas and the radical socialists. The leaders of this new opposition accepted the doctrines of Marx and Engels and held views similar to those outstanding leaders of the international workers' movement as August Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Viktor Adler and Leo Frankel, though in tactical questions they followed the radical socialists. Pál Gábor Engelmann, a tinsmith, headed the opposition which was also joined by many of the old members of the radical socialist group.

Engelmann was born in Pest but spent his apprenticeship abroad. In 1874 he worked in Germany where he joined the social democratic party and from then on he professed and disseminated the ideas of Marx and Engels. During the years of the emergency laws he lived in Bavaria and was one of those who had tried to set up an illegal party organization. Later, he continued his activities in Austria again in the camp of the radicals. His name appears not only in connection with the organizational activity of the party but also in socialist journalism; his theoretical articles on economics were published in the *Arbeit*, in Graz. In 1884, Engelmann was expelled from Austria as a "dangerous radical socialist". He then returned to Hungary and continued the fight at home for a social democratic mass-movement.

The members of the new, radical party opposition gathered around the Budapest Workers' Circle which had been established in 1885 to unite the trade organizations. They criticized the low political level of *Népszava* and *Arbeiter-Wochen-Chronik*, the moderate policy of the party leadership and its ineptness. *Gleichheit*, the paper of Viktor Adler, who tried to unite the social democrats of Austria, also supported their efforts, at times criticizing the policy of the MÁMP. "Their socialism is moderate, colourless," writes the paper, "similar to that which held sway in the early seventies on this side of the Lajta."²¹

In the late eighties the theoretical and organizational level of the socialist working-class movement of Hungary lagged behind the international working-class movement. In spite of the emergency laws, the German Social Democratic Party grew stronger and socialist ideas were widespread. The socialist movement of neighbouring Austria, which during the previous decade had been incapacitated by the struggle between the moderate and radical trends, was successfully trying to become a mass movement. Guided by Viktor Adler, socialists in growing numbers joined the struggle for party unity. In December 1888 the Hainfeld Unity Congress of the Austrian social democrats finally took place ending the breach in the party and accepting a uniform, Marxist programme, and began to extend and strengthen the movement.

²¹ "Glossen", *Gleichheit*, May 7, 1887.

By the end of the eighties, not only had there been a strengthening of the workers' parties of Germany and Austria but social democratic parties had been formed in almost all European countries. It became evident that the bourgeois governments' policy of force had not been effective. Therefore, the ruling parties began to turn their attention more intensively to the working-class question. In Germany, France and elsewhere the view that the policy of force had to be replaced by a "welfare policy", gained prevalence.

In Germany, Wilhelm II represented this trend, which he tried to persuade Chancellor Bismarck to accept. The Kaiser had hoped that relegating their power policy into the background and introducing social reforms and a policy of concessions would lead to the collapse of the social democratic movement and the strengthening of the government's base.

The affect of the new liberal policy toward the workers was soon felt in the Monarchy too. Austrian government circles – after prolonged debates – also decided to give priority to the reform policy and accepted the legal establishment of the Austrian Social Democratic Party.

In the late eighties, the leaders of the foremost European countries all had discussed the introduction of labour reforms. An international conference to be held in Bern was planned in early 1889, aimed at working out uniform labour reforms. In the meantime, however, Wilhelm II took the initiative. The seat of the conference was set for Berlin and the date for May 1890. Stress was put on the fact that the aim of the conference was to prevent "exaggerated demands" by the working class by introducing reforms.

The formation and strengthening of the social democratic parties, as well as the labour policy of the European governments becoming more moderate made it possible to convene the international organization of the social democratic workers' movement, the new International.

The Formation of the Second International and its Support of the Hungarian Socialist Movement

On July 14, 1889, on the centenary of the French bourgeois revolution, the parliament of the socialist workers of the world, the Founding Congress of the Second International, was held in Paris.

The speakers at the Congress defined the final aim of the social democratic movement as the conquest of political power, and the taking of the means of production into public ownership. They emphasized that the struggle for long-term aims as well as for immediate ones demanded the consolidation of the parties, the re-establishment and strengthening of international relations. This was served, among others, by the declaration of May Day as an international proletarian holiday, in a resolution of the Congress.

The most important tasks of the social democratic parties in the given period were defined as the organization and ideological training of the working class and the leading of the political and economic partial struggles. The Congress stressed that the political struggles, besides winning universal suffrage and other bourgeois democratic freedoms, had first of all to be aimed at forcing the ruling circles to

pass more effective laws for the protection of the workers. The congress formulated and listed point by point the social-political demands.

The resolutions of the founding congress marked the road for the further development of the working-class movement in Hungary too. The Paris Congress stressed as the main task the development of the social democratic parties into mass parties. It stated that no successful struggle could be waged for democratic civic liberties, or for safeguarding the interests of the workers, without creating an active mass movement.

The MÁMP was among the first to join the Second International. In this Leo Frankel had an important role, who, though having left the country in 1883 and settled down again in Paris after a few years' stay in Vienna, had closely followed the events and supported the struggles of the socialists in Hungary. In April 1889 he was in Budapest; this trip was connected with the preparations for the founding congress of Second International. Frankel's stay in Hungary was largely responsible for the MÁMP renewing its close ties with the international workers' movement and that it was among the initiators of the Paris Congress of the Second International. Already then, Frankel urged that the party improve its work, particularly the socialist education of the masses. "I am not surprised," he told the party leaders, "that the Austrian comrades call this party His Majesty's workers' party, because the party should have the obligation to develop its principles in a scientific way so that when it has to count on the people they will understand the kind of principles the party is fighting for".²²

Leo Frankel and Antal Ihrlinger represented the MÁMP at the Paris Congress. The radical workers' opposition took advantage of the occasion to be heard at this international forum. For financial reasons unable to send any of their leaders to Paris, they asked Julius Popp, the leader of the Association of the Viennese Shoemaker Journeymen, one of the leaders of the Austrian Social Democratic Party, to represent them.

At the congress, Antal Ihrlinger spoke about the working-class movement of Hungary, concealing the fact that the leadership of the MAMP was extremely loyal to the government and to the bourgeois opposition parties, even claiming that it was an independent political organization opposing the latter. In keeping with old traditions, he equated the opposition with the anarchists and disregarded any justified criticism voiced by them. "The movement has now reached the point", he said, "where disagreements within the party do no harm. Disputes are unavoidable, because the problem is to break with the anarchists who, in their majority are employed or supported by the police and thereby defamed the movement."²³

Ihrlinger said nothing about the failures committed during the organization among the workers, going so far as to declare that the party leadership was doing its best to develop the trade-union movement.

After Ihrlinger's address, Julius Popp rose to speak. He "... said that, although he was not a Hungarian, he represented the shoemakers of Budapest, that he had

²² Secret papers of the Chief of Police, 1889/111. (To be referred to as Rk. eln. res.) Report to the Chief of Police on April 23, 1889 by a detective assigned to keep the socialist movement under surveillance.

²³ *Protokoll des Internationalen Arbeiter-Congresses zu Paris*, p. 57, Wörlein et Comp., Nuremberg, 1890.

been asked by them and other comrades to bring to their attention that the "workers' party of Hungary" is an opportunist organization but there are loyal comrades who are trying to make the party conform to, and follow a theoretically firm and really social-democratic policy from which they have departed since the absence of Leo Frankel."²⁴

The debate between Ihrlinger and Popp convinced many leading members of the International that the leadership of the MÁMP had to be strengthened by including members of the radical socialist opposition. They proposed that the leaders of the Austrian Social Democratic Party should support the MÁMP in its efforts to reorganize itself.²⁵

The cooperation of the Austrian social democrats was warranted not only because Viktor Adler was most familiar with the situation in the Hungarian party but also because of the important task made urgent by the labour legislation. Once again that close unity of action had to be created which had previously characterized the working-class movement of Austria-Hungary, and which had later been disrupted, in part by the controversy in the Austrian movement and in part by the wrong policy pursued by the leadership of the MÁMP. The leaders of the Austrian Social Democratic Party were correct in their belief that the proletariat of the two countries in the Monarchy had to act in unison and with their combined strength make the government introduce social reforms.

Methods of developing the social democratic mass movement in Hungary and the cooperation of the Austrian and Hungarian socialists were discussed at a meeting on September 15, 1889 in Pozsony, attended by the leaders of both parties. The accepted resolution pointed out that the main task was to develop the MÁMP into an independent social democratic mass party free of the influence of bourgeois parties, fighting in the spirit of the objectives formulated at the Paris Congress and gathering within its ranks all the organized proletarians of Hungary. To advance the cooperation of the Austrian and Hungarian working-class movements the two party leaderships worked out a common resolution to be presented for acceptance by those taking part in the May Day celebrations. They agreed that the two workers' parties would simultaneously submit the resolution to their respective governments, with the request that it be given consideration as a basic principle for the conference on international labour legislation.

At the Pozsony conference Viktor Adler proposed that Pál Engelmann be also drawn into the leadership to help with the preparation for the unification of the MÁMP and the radical party opposition.

After the Pozsony conference the leaders of the trade organizations, of the opposition and the party leadership conferred in Budapest on September 21 and October 13. The persistent and enthusiastic activity which resulted from these deliberations was undertaken by the best of the organized workers in the interest of forming a socialist mass party. They resolved to centralize the trade organizations of the working class, to increase the circulation of the party papers and to

²⁴ *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, (Vienna), August 9, 1889. Popp's address at the Paris Congress does not appear in full in the minutes. (Op. cit., p. 57.)

²⁵ According to the annual report of the Vienna police head-quarters it was particularly Leo Frankel, Viktor Adler and Wilhelm Liebknecht who urged the Reorganization of the General Workers' Party (OL BM res. 1889/270, *Die sozialdemokratische und anarchistische Bewegung im Jahre 1889*, pp. 15-16.)

make preparations for the publication of a social democratic political daily paper. It was at this conference that the question of calling a party congress was first discussed.

The conference also elected a committee to lead the MÁMP. Antal Ihrlinger, who had until then led the party and had also edited the papers, was removed from all functions and Simon Stern, the most dynamic of the opposition, a young and much-travelled socialist teacher, was elected to take charge of the party papers. Pál Engelmann, the leader of the opposition, was entrusted with attending to the affairs of the party.

Zsigmond Csillag and Jakab Kürschner, who had accepted the resolution of the founding congress of the International and were willing to support the efforts of the new leaders, continued as members of the party leadership. At the beginning they did not exert restraining influence, the trend of party activity having been set by a small number but influential, radical-minded members of the leadership.

The work of party-building started with revived energy after the autumn conference of 1889. The *Népszava* and the *Arbeiter-Wochen-Chronic* undertook an important share in the struggle that started for the mass-organization of the working class. In simple terms the articles explained to the workers the truth about inherent exploitation in the capitalist mode of production. The new party leadership, as reflected by articles in the party papers, broke away from the earlier orientation of the MÁMP, which at the cost of renouncing social-democratic principles sought to win over nationalistic bourgeois forces influenced by the FP. The party paper publicly proclaimed the international character of the social democratic working-class movement – finding support in the Second International – and its independence from all other Hungarian parties of the wealthy classes. They criticized the ideas spread by the FP, pointing out that it had long since repudiated the democratic and revolutionary ideas of the 1848 revolution, that it was no longer fighting for the independence of the country and that its national slogans were for the sole purpose of diverting the attention of the working class from the struggle for class-interests. There was no other reason for focusing attention on independence slogans, emphasized the party press, than to prove the community of interests between the bourgeoisie and proletariat and curb the force of the class struggle. The standpoint of the new party leadership was identical with the view of Károly Farkas and the radical socialist group of the early eighties: the allies of the proletariat in this struggle to overthrow the capitalist world-system were not the Hungarian bourgeoisie but the workers of the world.

The orientation towards the FP having ended, the party leadership began to organize the urban and provincial proletarian masses. Profiting from the failures of the eighties, new methods were sought to enhance the mass influence of the party. With this end in view, they set out on the road suggested by Engels in the early 1890s to the American socialists. He wrote that they had to begin with trade unions if they wanted them to develop into mass-movements and every further step had to be forced upon them by a defeat.²⁶

Beginning with the autumn of 1889, the party leadership focused attention on the antagonism between capital and labour so as to get the workers to initiate

²⁶ Engel's letter to F. A. Sorge, February 1890, *Marx-Engels a szakszervezetekről* (Marx-Engels on the Trade Unions), p. 201, Szikra, Budapest, 1956.

movements for better wages. Such movements and strikes had proven to be a useful means of convincing the workers of the necessity to organize.

The economic situation in the early 1890s was conducive to the development of strike movements. From the late eighties Hungary too saw a large-scale economic development promoted by a new influx of foreign capital following the crisis. The movements for higher wages and strikes which in the eighties were still only sporadic, took on mass proportions in 1890 primarily for wage increases, shorter work hours and improvement of working conditions. The striking industrial workers were also joined by the miners. No more than fifteen strikes are on record for the decade between 1878 and 1887; in 1889 there were four, in the one year of 1890, however, the number of wage actions and strikes of the proletarians of the capital and the provinces rose to thirty.

The strengthening and further development of the trade-union movement was regarded as a major task from the point of view of increasing the influence of the party. It was paramount to develop the old and newly formed trade societies into modern socialist trade unions to encompass the hitherto indifferent workers, give them a socialist education, organize and conduct the economic struggles and thus lead these workers to the party.

Comprehending this, the party leadership, particularly Pál Engelmann and Samu Jászai, who were taken into the leadership at the beginning of 1890, worked hard to form trade societies in the unorganized trades. They helped to formulate the statutes, they attended and lectured at the trade meetings. Pál Engelmann in June 1890 prepared a special circular to promote the development of the trade-union movement. In addition to the local trade societies, the party leadership urged the formation of national organizations too.

The leaders of the party began as early as November 1889, to prepare for May Day, the international holiday of the workers. The May Day slogans called for the eight-hour work day, a day of rest on Sunday and other social reforms. In Budapest and in other larger cities, workers' meetings were held at which the significance of the demands was explained.

Despite preventive measures and molestation by the police, the first May Day became an imposing demonstration of the proletariat. In Budapest, more than 60,000 people marched to Városliget (City Park). The workers demanded labour legislation in the spirit of the resolutions of the Paris Congress of the Second International and approved the resolutions which had been accepted by the Pozsony conference jointly with the Austrian socialists. They decided to put the demands of the Paris Congress before parliament.

The May Day demonstrations were not confined to the capital. In the main industrial centres too there were workers meetings, with Hungarian, German, Slovak and Serbian workers all marching together.

The success of the international proletarian holiday linked closer not only the party and the working class but also the Hungarian and international working-class movement. The party leadership made direct contact with several leaders of the international working-class movement. Pál Engelmann, in a letter to Friedrich Engels, informed the aging revolutionist on the development of the Hungarian working-class movement, expressing at the same time his own high esteem for him. "I should feel it amiss", wrote Engelmann on June 7, 1889 to Engels, "not to

avail myself of this opportunity to express briefly the affectionate respect which is felt by every honest social democrat for you, our master and teacher."²⁷

The summer of 1890 was timely for the convening of the party congress. After ten years of relative stagnation, the workers' movement was making great strides forward. The party leadership had accepted the theoretical and tactical policy of the Second International, it renounced the past mistakes and had embarked successfully on the road toward building a mass party. The congress was to approve the activity of the party leadership officially and, by accepting a new programme, put the party on a more firm theoretical basis. The delegates of the socialists were to define the further tasks and tactics of the socialist working-class movement. Calling the congress meant bringing to the attention of the proletariat of the whole country that, despite molestations by the authorities and internal strife, the socialist workers' movement was alive and developing, and was calling to the ranks of the workers' party all those ready to take part in the hard and self-sacrificing struggle for a socialist society. However, the workers' party of Hungary was also indebted to the international workers' movement; although it had already proved with deeds, it also had to express formally that it regards itself an affiliate of the Second International and that it joined the international social democratic camp in name, too.

This had already been expressed in the congress call. The congress was convened as a "public party meeting of the social democratic workers' party of Hungary". As early as 1878 and 1880 the socialists wanted to name their party the social democratic party; the idea, therefore, was not new. This renewed attempt in 1890 to do so, was not merely the reiteration of an old attempt, but also expressed the wish to demonstrate with this change of name that the MÁMP had changed completely: so far as its ideological basis and practical efforts were concerned, the party had truly developed into a social democratic one.

There were other, political circumstances too, in deciding when to call the Congress. The previously mentioned changes in the policy of the governments toward the international workers' movement resulted in a further easing of the situation in 1890. The spring of 1890 saw the downfall of Bismarck, the notorious "iron chancellor", and, at the same time, that of the Kálmán Tisza government, which had laid claim to liberalism but had been anti-people, not averse to the use of autocratic means, and controlled the country from 1875 to 1890. In May 1890 an international labour protection conference was held in Berlin at which a resolution on the need for social legislation was adopted, urging the governments to prepare laws for the protection of the workers. Though the Szapáry government, succeeding Tisza's, made no important changes in labour policy, some labour laws, which were prepared already in 1889, were enacted in Hungary as well. In the spring of 1890, Sunday was declared a holiday and preparations were being completed on a proposal for health insurance. In 1890, not even the Hungarian government could deny that there was such a thing as the "working-class question", nor could it deny the social democratic party the right to legal existence.

²⁷ PI Archives, group 676. Published in the original German in *Acta Historica*, Nos. 3-4. (S. Vincze, Edit: "Briefwechsel zwischen Friedrich Engels und den ungarländischen Sozialdemokraten [1890-1895].")

When in September 1890 the emergency law was repealed in Germany, the way was cleared for the Hungarian working-class movement as well. The first congress of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary (MSzDP) was convened on December 7, 1890.

The First Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary

When the congress was called the leaders of the party were justified in believing that the congress of the multinational proletariat of Hungary, living under difficult conditions, which was to adopt a programme and a name, would command the interest and sympathy of prominent figures of the international workers' movement. This prompted the Hungarians to invite Friedrich Engels, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Karl Kautsky, Viktor Adler and many other foreign social democrats to the congress. Letters of greeting from the invited guests bear witness to the solidarity and cordiality of the international proletariat.

In his reply, Engels expressed satisfaction with the development of the Hungarian working-class movement. He wrote that the fact that there was a social democratic party in Hungary, was a further proof that modern large industry could not become entrenched in any country without stirring up the old pre-capitalist society, or without creating not only a capitalist class but also a proletariat, and thus a class struggle between the two and the emergence of a workers' party which aims to overthrow the bourgeois-capitalist world system. Aware of the multi-national character of the Hungarian proletariat, Engels did not fail in his brief letter to remind the congress of the significance of that fact. He wrote that they had the advantage in that they were already international, having in their ranks Hungarians, Germans, Rumanians, Serbs and Slovaks and concluded with a request to have his best wishes conveyed to the congress.²⁸

The Congress was attended by eighty-seven delegates from the capital and thirty-four from the provinces. Its most significant act was to accept the Declaration of Principles, which summarized the basic principles and main tasks of the party. Its text, apart from minor modifications, was identical with the best party programme of those days, the document that was accepted at the Hainfeld congress of the Austrian Social Democratic Party in 1888–1889.

In a departure from the usual programmes, which laid down the basic principles as well as the long-term and immediate objectives of the workers' movement, this programme only stated the basic principles of the party. At the Hainfeld conference this difference was explained as follows: "We had to consider the political relations, how the various authorities at times apply the laws and finally the economic conditions of workers living in different places, and this made us give such a form to our programme that would allow for the greatest freedom of movement for the individual, so that if a person is forced by circumstances to deviate from the way of action he shall not face the immediate danger of having violated the programme and perhaps be regarded as being outside of the party."²⁹

²⁸ Cf. Marx, K. und Engels, F.: *Werke*, Vol. 22, pp. 88–89, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1963.

²⁹ *Verhandlungen des Parteitag der Oesterreichischen Sozialdemokratie in Hainfeld*, p. 2, Bretschneider, Vienna, 1889.

Despite the fact that the Declaration of Principles – as intended by its Austrian authors – wished to provide greater freedom of movement for the members of the party, the Marxist principles of the party were clearly and unambiguously formulated. Compared to the programme of 1880 of the MMP, the Declaration of Principles was in many ways more advanced and of a higher standard.

These points included the statement in the introduction on the class-character of the state and, though in veiled terms, the declaration that the party, unlike the programme of 1880, would not conform to the laws of the class state. The Declaration of Principles made it clear that the party wanted to realize its programme by making use of "all means leading to the goal and corresponding to the natural sense of justice of the people."³⁰

The insistence on the "legal road" had in the 1880s become the slogan of the moderate trend, but now its rejection proved that the Austrian and Hungarian social democratic parties had accepted the revolutionary view of the radical socialists and proclaimed the idea of consistent class struggle.

The Declaration of Principles definitely laid down the Marxian doctrine of the inevitable decay of the capitalist social system and recognized the historical mission of the "proletariat organized in a party". "The programme of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary is therefore a programme to organize the proletariat, arouse its consciousness of its position and tasks, prepare it mentally and physically for the struggle so that it may completely fulfill its mission in world history." This sentence also shows that in both the Austrian and Hungarian workers' movement the concept that the interests of the working class radically differed from those of other classes of society, and that the proletariat was also the protagonist of the fight for social progress, had taken root.

The second part of the Declaration of Principles summarized the basic principles of the social democrats in seven points. The first one stressed the international character of the party: "The social democratic workers' party is an international party which does not recognize privilege of nation, birth or property, and declares that the fight against exploitation has to be as international as exploitation itself."

The open declaration of the international character of the party proved again the development of the socialist workers' movement. In the critique of the Gotha programme, Marx criticized the leaders of the German socialist party because they compromised over the question of internationalism and had omitted this basic thesis from the programme. The programme of 1880 of the MAMP made no reference either to the international character of the party. The MSzDP, by publicly professing the idea of proletarian internationalism, was prepared to run the risk of being labelled unpatriotic by the ruling classes and by those workers who on nationalistic grounds opposed the socialist movement.

The second and third points stressed the importance of disseminating socialist ideas and declared that to achieve this aim the party should make use of all means of publicity. For this reason it demanded that all obstacles to the freedom of ex-

³⁰ For the text of Declaration of Principles, see, *Népszava*, December 14, 1890. Also published in *A Magyar Munkásmozgalom Történetének Válogatott Dokumentumai* (Selected Documents of the History of the Hungarian Workers' Movement), vol. 2, pp. 40–41, ed. by Tibor Erényi and Edit S. Vincze Szikra, Budapest, 1954. (To be quoted as MMTVD, vol. 2.)

pression (press laws, laws curbing the right of assembly and association) be eliminated and universal suffrage be introduced. The Declaration of Principles demanded universal suffrage only as "one of the important instruments of agitation and organization", without deceiving itself as to the worth and value of parliamentarianism. This expression again denoted the victory of radical ideas over the moderate trends, which had solely stressed the right to vote and parliamentary struggle.

The fourth point of the general section shows that the leaders of the MSzDP thought it possible for the living conditions of the workers to improve even amidst capitalist social relations. The party programme therefore demanded "thorough and genuine" labour legislation, while also insisting that "the unhampered establishment of trade-societies" was essential for giving leadership to the economic struggles. Thus the socialists of Hungary adhered to the Marxist teaching on the unity of the political and economic struggle, dissociating themselves from syndicalist and anarchist endeavours.

Point five demanded free secular education and an end to the cultural monopoly of the ruling classes in higher education. Point six dealt with an old demand of the socialists, the disbanding of the standing army and the arming of the people.

The seventh and last point of the Declaration of Principles was of great significance, declaring that the leadership of the MSzDP intended "to represent the class-interests of the proletariat at all times and shall most energetically oppose the negation or camouflaging of class differences." With this declaration the party wanted to dissociate itself from the opportunist tactics which had been pursued in the eighties.

The First Congress of the MSzDP unanimously accepted the Declaration of Principles. This document based on Marxist ideology was in force up to 1903, but its main views and principles determined the ideology and concepts of the social democratic workers for later decades too. After the Declaration of Principles had been accepted, the Congress participants, amidst cheering and applause, resolved that the new name of the party would be "The Social Democratic Party of Hungary".

Other points on the agenda of the First Congress of the MSzDP dealt with topical questions the party had to solve. The resolutions extended practically to all fields of party work.

The point dealing with the problems of political struggle served to concretize the political demands which had been formulated only in general terms in the Declaration of Principles and to define the most effective means of struggle. The resolution which was accepted demanded universal suffrage with secret ballot, right of association, assembly and freedom of press, the right to change residence and an end to the banishment of workers who have left their homes to seek employment, back to their original addresses.

However, the Congress did not give deep enough consideration to the tactics of the political struggle. The workers of Hungary had by then been for more than two decades demanding basic civil liberties, without any tangible results. The inadequate and often wrong tactics (in principle and practice) had to be re-examined; it was timely and possible to define the means of political struggle. The new party leadership did not, however, attribute much significance to the political struggle and in the given period it considered it more important to organize and

ideologically educate the workers. However, the attitude of the radical opposition, supporting the party leadership, was defined, as far as the trend and instruments of political struggle were concerned, by Károly Czinder, the shoemaker's delegate, in his speech: "It is said that in the event of universal suffrage, Hungary, because of its several nationalities, would perish. I am convinced, however, and history bears me out, that civil rights have never destroyed a country, but there are numerous examples to prove the contrary ... We must act *en masse* and must energetically demand this so that the ruling class will have no other recourse but to grant political rights."³¹

Besides the political struggle, the First Congress also dealt with another important field, the economic struggle of the workers. Although the question was not discussed separately, two items on the agenda briefly dealt with it: "The attitude of workers to social reforms" and the item on trade-union organization. Pál Engelmann and Jakab Kürschner – reporting on social reforms – correctly pointed out that the social measures, which the governments had been strongly urging, were of a dual nature; although they were intended to prove the good will of governments to the workers they in no way met the basic demands of the workers and were only for the sake of appearance. For this reason it was the basic interest of the proletariat to launch the struggle "for the immediate improvement of their living conditions" and to force the government to provide effective labour legislation. On the basis of the May Day resolutions the congress summarized the economic demands again and urged uniform, internationally valid legislation to protect the workers.

The item on the trade unions also dealt with the radical weapon of the workers, that of strikes. Pál Engelmann and Samu Jászai, setting out from the strike experiences in Hungary, pointed out that the strike is a double-edged weapon and strikes that are unprepared and uncertain as to their outcome are morally and economically harmful. However, strikes are often inevitable during the struggle between capital and labour and can only be effective if workers act in an organized way.

The speakers designated the fight for higher wages as the most important task of the trade unions, but were also aware of the fact that trade unions have an important role in the ideological and political education of the working class. They briefly summarized those basic principles, which from September 1889, had often been expounded both in the party press and at workers' meetings. The proposed resolution recommended the formation of national trade unions but if that is not possible then the formation of local unions in industrial centres. The resolution stressed that both male and female unskilled workers had to be organized into trade unions. This point also proved that the social democratic party had broken with its earlier practice of organizing only the skilled workers and the workers in the small industries and had started to extend the mass base of the party.

The next point on the agenda, after the problems of the political and economic struggle of the working class, was the agrarian question which was of tremendous

³¹ A magyarországi szociáldemokrácia 1890. évi december 7-én és 8-án Budapesten tartott pártgyűlésének jegyzőkönyve (Minutes of the Party Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary held on December 7 and 8, 1890), published by Jakab Kürschner and Pál Engelmann, Budapesti Könyvnyomda és Kiadó Szövetkezet, 1891. (MMTVD, vol. 2, p. 47.)

significance in Hungary. This was the first time that this problem has ever been discussed at a congress since the emergence of the workers' movement, moreover, "the situation of the agrarian workers" item had not even been on the agenda of the Hainfeld congress of the Austrian social democrats.

The speaker on this question, Adolf Kiss, pointed out that capitalism in agriculture develops along the same lines as in industry: large-scale farms operating more economically can, within a short time, swallow up small farms, thus sooner or later reducing the landed peasantry to poverty, to being agricultural proletarians.

The proposed resolution was the real solution of the agrarian question in the public ownership of land. However, in the hope that the agrarian proletariat would, even under the capitalist social order, achieve reforms which would bring them closer to the realization of their final aim, the resolution stated that the party demanded that "as a transitional stage from private management" state and crown properties, church land, estates and mines be transformed into cooperatives or model-farms, even under the capitalist system. The party regarded as its task to fight not only for the protection of the industrial workers, but also for the improvement of the living conditions of the agricultural proletariat. The resolution demanded the "immediate passage of such a law which, cognizant of the peculiarities of agriculture, would provide protection to agrarian workers against unbounded exploitation".³²

The resolution of the MSzDP on the agrarian issue corresponded with minor modifications, to that of the German Social Democratic Party, passed at its Stuttgart conference on June 6, 1870, and the report of Adolf Kiss was based on *Zur Grund- und Bodenfrage*, written by Wilhelm Liebknecht in 1874.

The party leadership which had only been active for a year and a half was not yet able to make a deep analysis of the Hungarian agrarian situation, nor to work out an independent agrarian programme. Therefore, it adapted the results of the international workers' movement, particularly the authoritative documents of the more highly developed German workers' movement. Thus they took over a resolution that was based on Marxist principles and the product of the victory over anti-Marxist trends, opposing the resolution of the congress of the First International at Brussels in 1868 and at Basel in 1869. The resolution had been defended by the social democrats of Germany in an ideological struggle against the petty-bourgeois democrats. The adaptation of the resolution of Stuttgart proved that the social democrats of Hungary also accepted the revolutionary demand for putting an end to the private ownership of land and thus dissociated itself from the democratic political endeavours based on the principle of bourgeois property.

The First Congress also aimed at extending the party's mass base when it put the agrarian issue on the agenda and adopted a resolution on it. In this early phase of the workers' movement, the main task was to enlighten the agrarian workers and to disseminate socialist ideas among them. The congress, in discussing the situation of the agrarian workers, explained that the small-holder peasantry was inevitably faced with proletarianization, thus proving that the cause for which the industrial proletariat and its party had been fighting was also the cause of the agricultural proletariat and of the small-holder peasants too.

³² Op. cit., p. 57.

As a special item on the agenda, the congress also dealt with the party press and socialist publications. The resolution, which had been accepted, stressed the strengthening and distribution of the party and trade papers. The third point of the resolution was of particular importance which, in contrast with subsequent practice, did not fail to see that the industrial and agrarian proletariat was made up of many nationalities: "... the party meeting states that because of the multi-national structure of Hungary, it deems it necessary that socialist leaflets be circulated in the languages of these nationalities so that social democratic principles may reach them more easily."³³

The first congress of the MSzDP met the expectations and also fulfilled its mission. It formulated the final aim of the workers' movement, as well as the immediate militant programme of the industrial and agrarian proletariat; it urged the proletariat to intensify its educational activity and to organize. The fact that it took the name of Social Democratic Party, that it approved the Declaration of Principles, the debates and congress resolutions all proved that this party – as a result of development which had begun in the autumn of 1889 – was firmly based on Marxism and had become an organic part of the revolutionary workers' movement. Proof of proletarian internationalism and acceptance of Marxist teachings was shown when at the motion of the chairman the delegates ended their conference by cheering Friedrich Engels.

The Development of the Social Democratic Movement in the Early Nineties

The first congress of the MSzDP was followed by another revival of the socialist workers movement. The workers were better organized and new trade unions were formed, particularly in the provincial cities. The favourable conditions brought about by the economic boom were frequently used to advantage by the proletarians in the struggle for higher wages and for ending the inhuman working conditions. In these strike-movements, in contrast with the previous ones, it was particularly the workers of large factories who took part. This movement was characterized by the large number of striking workers and the prolonged period of the strikes. In 1894, for example, 5,000 factory furniture workers went on strike – remaining out for ten weeks – for the improvement of their working conditions.

The strike-wave also spread to a number of provincial cities and first of all the "slaves" of the mines revolted against methods introduced to lower wages. In 1892 the Rumanian and Hungarian miners of Petrozsény, later 2,700 miners at the Anina mines of the Austro-Hungarian State Railways went on strike. One of the largest miners' actions took place in 1893 in the Pécs area. The strike, in which 3,000 miners took part, was brutally suppressed by the local authorities.

As a result of the agitational and organizational activity of the MSzDP leadership, socialist teachings reached the agrarian proletariat and the poor peasantry too in the early nineties. The capitalist development of agriculture in the seventies and eighties had brought about a deterioration in the situation of the peasantry and the pauperization of the landless and the small-holders. The bourgeois revolution of 1848 had not destroyed the system of latifundia: farms with more than

³³ Op. cit., p. 60.

100 holds (1 h = 1.42 acres) comprised almost half of the arable land of the country. It had become almost impossible for the peasantry to acquire land. In 1890, there were over four million agrarian workers out of the country's population of eighteen million.

The agrarian crisis of the eighties had brought misery to the landless millions. The capitalist development of latifundia and the use of agricultural machinery increased unemployment. There were too many workers, thus wages were reduced, the crop shares became smaller, the land rent went up. Masses of agrarian workers wandered far and wide, often going abroad and they worked at road building and river control. When towards the end of the decade mechanized excavation was introduced the navvies, unable to obtain employment, had returned to their villages en masse.

The burden of the agrarian crisis was particularly felt by the paupers living in the southern part of the Duna-Tisza region. Here, wedged in between the latifundia, the landless peasants were crammed in large numbers in poverty stricken villages. This is why this region became the hot-bed of socialist agrarian movements. The agrarian proletariat formed peasant-societies and reading circles and analysed and discussed social democratic teachings at evening gatherings.

The organization of the village proletariat led the ruling classes to provocative acts. In the spring and summer of 1891 there were clashes between the local gendarme and the agrarian proletariat in a number of villages. The largest action took place at Hódmezővásárhely in April 1894.

The General Workers' Reading Society of Hódmezővásárhely – the local organization of the MSzDP – had some 1,700 members in 1894 and its influence extended to several thousands of agricultural workers. The local authorities had for long been concerned by the activity of the society. In April 1894 the papers and books of the society were confiscated with provocative intent by the authorities. János Szántó Kovács, the leader of the society, who demanded that the confiscated documents be returned and protested the brutal violation of the right of organization, was arrested and the masses assembling to free him were met with a volley of gun-fire.

News of the Hódmezővásárhely events spread throughout the country and attracted attention even abroad. Friedrich Engels also referred to the clashes in his letter to the 1894 congress of the MSzDP. He evaluated the event as the ascendancy of the capitalist mode of production in agriculture which inevitably led the agrarian proletariat to class struggle.³⁴

The agrarian proletariat and the poor peasantry took part in the agrarian movements of the early nineties which were mainly started for the right to have a socialist organization and the right of association. In the background of the movement, however, there was everywhere the effort to improve the situation of the agrarian proletariat. The demands formulated during the struggle were aimed at restricting capitalist exploitation and getting better wages and working conditions. Although there was a strong desire for land among those who took part in the movement, the question of distributing the land was not raised in the first phase of the agrarian movement. The movement had a socialist character; or-

³⁴ For Engels' letter of May 15, see Marx, K. und Engels, F.: *Werke*, vol. 22, p. 445, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1963.

ganizationally and as to its aims it belonged to the social democratic workers' movement.

The strengthening movement of the industrial and agrarian proletariat set off drastic government measures. Those members in the leadership of the MSzDP who in the eighties had advocated more moderate tactics – Zsigmond Csillag, Adolf Kiss and others – viewed the intensification of government terror with anxiety, and tried to steer party activity along a more peaceful course. Pál Engelmann and his supporters on the other hand sought to have a greater role for the radical socialists in leading the party. In 1892 internal strike broke out in the leading bodies of the party because of tactical and personal differences.

The radical group saw, as the base of the fight against the capitalist system, the Hungarian and non-Hungarian industrial and agrarian proletarians. It consistently counter-posed the interests of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and called for unrelenting, uncompromising class struggle against the capitalist state, the government party and all shades of bourgeois opposition. Those belonging to the moderate trend also were for organizing the proletariat, they approved of an ever broader mass party, but wanted to obtain political rights and improvement in the situation of the working class not by mass movements which would have entailed risks, but rather by gaining the support of the government, and even more so, of the bourgeois opposition in Parliament, of those representatives of the Independence Party who were sympathetic to the workers. They did not want to clash with the ruling classes or with the government; they held that peaceful enlightenment and organizational activity within legal bounds would be more fruitful than mass movements.

The fight between the radical and moderate group, which split the ranks of the organized workers too, went on for years. After several attempts, the unity of the party was finally reestablished at the congress of 1896. The most prominent leaders of both the radical and the moderate wing – the radical Pál Engelmann and his successor, Ignác Silberberg, a printer, and the moderate Zsigmond Csillag and Adolf Kiss – had to resign. The new leaders of the party were mainly young social democrats belonging to the centre. The new leadership included Károly Teszársz, who later became a leader of the trade-union movement, Sándor Rády, who had organized the iron workers' union and Jakab Weltner, the well-known leader of the MSzDP at the turn of the century.

Thereafter the party was guided by the new leadership. Although the representatives of the more revolutionary workers from time to time opposed the tactical-political actions of the party leadership, they could no longer exert influence in the leadership. By the turn of the century the characteristic features of the Hungarian social democratic workers' movement had emerged; these are dealt with in the following section.

The Nineteenth Century Social Democrats on the Problems of Social Development in Hungary

Although the general laws of capitalist development prevailed in Hungary too, there were many unsolved problems which prevented the free bourgeois development of the country. The bourgeois revolution of 1848 had not destroyed

the latifundia of feudal origins, it had not realized the fundamental democratic transformation of the country, it had not satisfactorily resolved the relationship between Austria and Hungary and the very important nationality question. Due to the *Ausgleich* of 1867, the problems remained unsolved and this complicated the class struggle of the proletariat.

The concepts of the MSzDP, leaders, regarding the problems arising from the peculiar development of Hungary, had already been taking shape at the time of the First Congress. Even in the nineteenth century, the social democratic leaders had been concerned with the future of the country and had formed definite opinion on the further development of Hungary. Zsigmond Csillag summarized this at the first congress of the MSzDP as follows: "The economic, as well as the political development of Hungary has been following the same course as the other European countries, there is nothing exceptional here that chauvinistic ignorance and demagoguery would like to make the working people believe. The difference here corresponds to the gap in time between the economic development of Hungary and Western Europe, with the latter somewhat preceding us in economic development mainly due to their favourable geographic situation, particularly the closeness of the sea which is favourable for world trade. The road and the trend are, however, the same."³⁵

The leaders of the MSzDP, therefore, set out from the fact that Hungary was a capitalist country, which at the most was more backward and less developed than the West-European countries. The tasks of the proletariat therefore did not at all differ from those of the West-European proletariat; in Hungary, too, the task was to bring about a socialist society. This view accorded with that of the other parties of the Second International; the period of revolutions having ended, the workers of all countries had to prepare for the next revolution which would then be the revolution of the proletariat. The Hungarian social democrats, who regarded themselves as members of both the First and Second International, held to this fundamental Marxist thesis as one of the basic theses of socialist ideas, regarding it as their historic mission to prepare the proletariat of Hungary for a socialist revolution.

The conclusion that the contradictions of society are a concomitant of capitalist development which cannot be solved within the framework of capitalism, was drawn by the social democrat leaders from the Marxist teachings about capitalist society. Party policy did not exclude the possibility of improving the situation of the exploited by certain reforms in the capitalist social system. However, they hoped for a final solution only from socialist revolution, which, according to contemporary social democrats will be victorious in the form of a socialist world revolution, starting from the most highly developed capitalist countries.

The social democratic party of the nineties, along with the general questions of socialist transformation, often concerned itself with the special problems of Hungarian development.

The constitutional relationship between Austria and Hungary was one of those questions which at the close of the century had most frequently held the public attention in Hungarian political life. The FP, the strongest opposition party in Parliament, had constantly kept this problem on the agenda. Parliament members

³⁵ The minutes of the First Congress, p. 37.

and the press had constantly opposed the system of common ministries, demanding full economic and political independence for Hungary. The national minorities of the country, which were oppressed and deprived of legal rights, were treated with nationalistic impatience by the FP, insisting on the hegemonic role of the Hungarians and on the territorial integrity of the country. Although the MSzDP constantly criticized the anti-people policy of the government Liberal Party, it nevertheless, considered the FP as a more dangerous opponent because it could influence a part of the workers and peasantry with nationalistic slogans. The pro-independence politicians, particularly their small artisan supporters, attributed the bad situation of the workers, their misery and defencelessness to the constitutional relationship of Austria with Hungary, thus preventing the proletariat from recognizing the bourgeoisie as their real enemy and from expecting the class struggle to bring an easing of their situation. The endeavour to bring the proletariat to a consciousness of their class situation and dispel the legend of the community of interests of the bourgeoisie and proletariat and of the need for national unity against Austria had prevented the social democratic party from recognizing the great importance of the national question.

The MSzDP did not deny, moreover, it sharply criticized the chauvinist policy of the ruling circles and protested against the defencelessness and subjection of the nationalities. The leaders of the party clearly discerned the bourgeois class interest behind the dominating nationalist ideas, and they concentrated their attention primarily on the contradictions between capital and labour. Their main effort was aimed at preventing the developing unity between national minority workers and their "own" nationalistic bourgeoisie. The proletariat of the various nationalities were taught not to ally themselves with their own exploiters against the Hungarian ruling classes but with the oppressed Hungarian workers against their Hungarian, German, Rumanian, etc., exploiters. The MSzDP often spoke out against the bourgeois nationalism of the national minorities, at the same time recognizing the right of all nations to autonomy. "The social democrats, not only in words but in deeds, proclaim their support for the full autonomy of every nation, nationality and race according to language or other characteristics,"³⁶ wrote the *Népszava*.

In the national and national minority question the social democratic policy was motivated by the desire to win the proletariat away from the bourgeoisie. However, in the agrarian question its policy was determined by the perspective of socialist revolution.

It cannot be said the MSzDP did not see the basic problems of the situation in Hungarian agriculture. As early as 1891, they pointed out that "... our agriculture is ailing, on the one hand under the oppressive weight of the latifundia, on the other under the limitations of our conditions; our land has been largely parcelled up and finally there is a lack of satisfactory means of production..."³⁷ Yet they did not see the solution in the revolutionary distribution of land but in making it public property and cultivating it in common. The MSzDP considered the distribution of land – on the example of the 1848 revolution – as an unnecessary digression.

³⁶ "A világpolgárság eszméje" (The Concept of Cosmopolitanism), *Népszava*, July 19, 1895.

³⁷ "A földműves-osztály nyomora és megmentése" (The Misery of the Agrarian Class and its Rescue), *Népszava*, October 18, 1891.

"This is unlikely to improve the system", wrote the party press, "and it would only result in making the land the prey of the big landowners, those hyenas, as it happened in Hungary after the 1848 revolution when the peasant obtained land only to be dispossessed in his own country won with his own blood."³⁸

The standpoint of the MSzDP on the agrarian question corresponded to the prevailing views in the international workers' movement. Nevertheless, it became obvious that the rejection of the land distribution was preventing the full development of the worker-peasant alliance.

In judging the peculiarities of Hungarian development, the MSzDP in the last century based itself on the general Marxist theories valid in all countries. To analyse those features of Hungarian capitalism, which digressed from the general and in order to stay politically active, the party, as the leader of the working class and of the progressive forces, had first to master the basic theories of Marxism and disseminate them among the urban and agrarian proletariat. In order to become the leader of the progressive non-proletarian forces of society the party had to first dissociate itself from the non-Marxist trends, parties and groups. In the late eighties and early nineties, this was an essential task without the solution of which no progress could be made and no independent Marxist proletarian party, independent of all bourgeois parties, could be formed and strengthened.

It was to the credit of the pioneers of the socialist workers' movement – the founders of the first socialist workers organizations and of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party – that the essential Marxist teachings, above all the ideas of proletarian internationalism, the class struggle, and the prospect of a socialist society became deeply rooted in the Hungarian social democratic movement. The fact that the MSzDP could not give a correct answer to the complex problems, which had arisen in the period of imperialism, was mainly due to the changing line of the international and domestic workers' movement at the turn of the century and to the reformist concepts, gaining dominance in the working-class movement.

³⁸ "A földművelő proletárság 'megmentése'" ("Rescuing" the Agrarian Proletariat), *Népszava*, August 19, 1892.

The Activities of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary during the First Decade of the Century

by

Tibor Erényi

Hungarian Workers at the Turn of the Century

The turn of the century was marked by the emergence of imperialism in Hungary as well. At the beginning of the twentieth century shareholders' companies already predominated in industry. Between 1900 and 1913, their number doubled, reaching over sixteen-hundred. The majority were grouped in cartels and a large number of the cartels in 1913 were joint Austrian-Hungarian monopolies. About one-third of the industrial shares were held by foreign capital. Also at the turn of the century banking and industrial capital began to interpenetrate and finance capital began to be developed. A peculiar feature of the developing Hungarian financial oligarchy was the interconnectedness of the industrial and the financial magnates with the wealthiest families of the landed aristocracy. In other words, the earlier features of Hungarian development – strong economic dependence on foreign countries and the extensive economic-political interest of the large landowners – were also present during those years. There were no changes in the political make-up of the country, but society was in a state of change. The increased strength of the working-class movement was an indicacy of this situation.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, at the time of emerging imperialism, Hungary had reached the stage where relatively large numbers of workers were effected by the organizational activities of the socialists. There were objective and subjective reasons for these significant and positive changes as compared to the previous decades. Social democracy was the movement of the industrial proletariat and its development cannot be set apart from the development of its social base. The rapid industrial development that started after 1867 was checked by the economic crisis of 1873, but in the mid 80s it was followed by a new boom. The result of this development was that in 1890, some 100,000 workers were employed in factories of over twenty workers and there were some 50,000 workers in mining and metallurgy. In the same period, the number of workers in small industries rose to 300,000. Therefore, despite developments, small industry still played a great role, as did the onesidedness of the industrial structure, expressed in the under-development of some industrial branches employing large numbers of workers (particularly the textile industry). The number of industrial workers, at the time, comprised three per cent of the population.

During the first years of the twentieth century, there were some 700,000 industrial workers in Hungary and some 40 per cent of them were employed in large factories. A special characteristic of this development was that small industry – although not keeping up with the large industries – strongly maintained its position, becoming even stronger in certain branches (repairs and service indus-

tries). A decade later, the number of industrial workers passed the million mark, while the population (excluding Croatia) was over eighteen million. Half of all workers were employed in large industry. In the decade before the outbreak of the First World War, 25 per cent of all wage-earners, including those employed in trade and transport, belonged to the ranks of the working class.

The onesided structure of the industrial proletariat also changed. The government's policy of industrialization (subsidies) had aimed – and not without results – at making the industrial structure more proportionate. All the industrial branches which up to the last decade of the nineteenth century were practically non-existent (textile, leather, paper industries) had not only taken root but were developing relatively swiftly. As a result of this development the workers of the above-mentioned industries joined the ranks of the organized workers as did the chemical workers somewhat later. The skilled workers were still the backbone of the working class; the number of semi-skilled machine workers was still small while the number of day-labourers and seasonal-workers was very large. The process of regional concentration also advanced. The industrial proletariat was chiefly – (some 30 per cent) – concentrated in the capital and its vicinity and in some provincial industrial centres – mainly near sources of raw materials. Urbanization was accompanied by a process of natural assimilation. (In 1880, some 62 per cent of the urban population, by 1910, some 74 per cent were Hungarians.) The number of Hungarians in the ranks of the industrial proletariat also increased. In the years immediately before the First World War, two-thirds of the industrial proletariat of Hungary – as compared to the 45 per cent of the early seventies – was of Hungarian origin, the rest being mainly German and Slovak, with some Rumanian and Serbian, etc. The economic situation of the working class in the first years of the twentieth century, at the time of the great economic crisis, deteriorated and about one-seventh (100,000) of all workers were unemployed. As a result of the class struggle the work hours were reduced but the national average was still 10–11 hours a day. As for employment the situation improved considerably from 1903, but in 1913 there were signs of a new crisis.

The essence of the process from the turn of the century to the outbreak of the First World War was that Hungary changed from a backward agrarian country to a moderately developed agrarian-industrial one.

Under what political conditions, during the quarter century prior to the First World War, did the Hungarian working-class movement carry on its activities? The accelerated capitalist development brought about a maturing of the crisis of the dualist system and a sharpening of political differences. Eventually this led to the political crisis of 1905–1906, to the downfall of the Liberal Party which had been in power since 1875 and to the accession to power of a coalition of the opposition parties. However, the crisis brought no modification of the dualist system. In 1910, the coalition was replaced by the successor of the Liberal Party, the Party of National Work (NMP), which represented large landowners and capitalists. Immediately before the war, the leading personality of the party, Count István Tisza, disposed of the parliamentary opposition, formed a government and retained power until the spring of 1917.

The labour policy of the Hungarian governments in the period treated essentially followed the trend established before the turn of the century. The basic principles can be summarized in the following points: The political and economic

movement of the industrial proletariat was to be conducted in legality but under strict police supervision. By means of extremely limited suffrage, the Social Democratic Party was to be kept from becoming a parliamentary force. (Only at the end of the period were the ruling circles reconciled to certain suffrage reforms and to the idea of a few social democratic mandates in parliament.) The permanent objective of the government's labour policy was to prevent the social democrats from organizing certain important categories of the workers (the workers of state owned factories, miners, railway-workers) and to prevent "inciting" among the agrarian proletariat and the small-holder peasantry. Most of these prohibitions were successfully enforced.

There was very little social-welfare legislation, especially as compared with Germany. There were such noteworthy landmarks as Sunday being declared a day of rest and the introduction of social insurance (1891), its extension in 1907 and the defining of the labour relations of agricultural workers (1907).

Finally, of considerable importance was the fact that in 1912–1913, the government – in connection with the danger of war – had parliament pass laws which to some extent already prepared the militarization of economic life and threatened the previously granted possibility of organizing, and disseminating ideas. These laws were put into effect during the period between 1914–1918.

The Social Base of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary

It was not uncommon in earlier Hungarian historiography for this question to be oversimplified by writers of various views. The prevailing opinion was that the Social Democratic Party of Hungary (MSzDP) and the trade unions closely connected with it (with few exceptions) relied on the relatively better paid skilled workers of the small industries. However, a study of the available historical facts discloses how obviously untenable this view was. It should be sufficient to refer to the mass demonstrations of the hundreds of thousands of workers in the years before the First World War to show that in the fifteen years prior to the First World War the MSzDP was a considerable political factor in Hungary. Nevertheless, a movement which is based on a narrow and insignificant social stratum cannot become a national political factor. The subsequent unquestionable mass influence of the MSzDP is inexplicable if it were regarded as having been based exclusively on the above-mentioned strata of the working class. Unfortunately, at the present stage of research – partly owing to the scarcity of direct sources – the question of the contemporary mass base of the MSzDP cannot be clarified satisfactorily in all of its details. However, it can be ascertained that as early as 1904–1905, a significant part of the 50 to 70,000 organized workers according to the statistical data of that period were of the iron- and machine-industry which were definitely large industries, and the building trades which in many respects was also a major industry. This held true even more in the period of the economic revival between 1905–1907 and, despite a temporary recession, in the following years. In the period immediately preceding the First World War, the number of organized workers was about one hundred thousand, comprising at least 10 to 15 per cent of all industrial workers of the country and 30 per cent in Budapest. The bulk of the organized workers were skilled since they had the most

opportunity to familiarize themselves with social democratic agitation and they were in relatively less danger from the employers' retaliation. The economic actions and strikes of that period prove – as reflected in many important demands – that the social democratic workers generally represented the interest of all the workers. The demands were in the main aimed at improving the work conditions of skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers (seasonal workers and day-labourers). Otherwise the party would have been isolated from the masses of workers and the strikes the social democrats initiated would not have become real mass actions. The political actions organized by the party, though conforming with the party leadership's strong concentration on the achievement of bourgeois democratic freedoms (suffrage, right of association and assembly), unquestionably represented the interests of the entire working class and moreover, of all the working people of Hungary. To quote the words of the great Hungarian poet Endre Ady "in the Babel of slaves", that was contemporary Hungary, there was no party more radical, more left wing or more important as a political organization than the MSzDP. This is why the MSzDP (including all social democratic type of organizations: regional party organizations, trade unions, worker and agrarian societies, self-education societies, women's and youth organizations, reading circles, private societies) encompassed the most class conscious and most active sections of the Hungarian workers.

It was indicative of the MSzDP's development that already at the turn of the century, though not large in numbers, it had an important, nationally known and recognized leading group carrying on a successful struggle for the political aims formulated by the party. The majority of the leaders came from that section of skilled workers who were the Hungarian pioneers of social democratic organizing. The overwhelming majority of the pre-war (and of the war and the revolutionary period) social democratic leaders got into the leadership in the late nineties as young men in their twenties, becoming "full-time" politicians and trade-union leaders and paid either by the party or one of its bodies, by a social security institution or a trade-union. Most of them were self-taught and the kind of people who regularly and for prolonged periods, lived in Germany and Austria and through self-education acquired a good general and political perspective. Their way of life developed accordingly and most of them became and remained bourgeois-intellectuals. They never wallowed in riches, as the right-wing press often charged, but neither did they suffer from want.

From 1898 the "first man of the party" was Ernő Garami, a technician by training, who later became the full-time editor of the central party paper, *Népszava*. Jakab Weltner, a cabinet-maker, became national secretary of the party; Manó Buchinger, a book-binder, likewise became national secretary; the stonemason Dezső Bokányi was the first central secretary of the party (in the late 90s), then continuously until 1918 a member of the party's Executive Committee and the party's most popular orator; Károly Teszársz, an iron-worker, was Chairman of the Trade-Union Council; Sándor Garbai, a construction worker, was the leader of the Association of Construction Workers; Sándor Csizmadia, an agricultural worker, was the president of the National Association of Agricultural Workers. The only real intellectual in the party leadership was Dr. Zsigmond Kunfi, a secondary-school teacher, who became editor of the party's theoretical periodical. Among the representatives of the opposition trends were a good many

intellectuals. Dr. Ervin Szabó, a university graduated librarian, Gyula Alpári, a journalist, Dr. Gyula Mérő and Dr. Jenő Landler, lawyers. As for workers, there were Ignác Bellér, iron-worker and János Hirosik, construction worker – later both worked as journalists at social democratic opposition papers.

The Basic Ideological Principles of the Party. Topical Problems of the MSzDP and of Hungarian Social Development

From the time of its emergence, the Hungarian social democratic movement functioned as an organic part of the international socialist workers' movement.

Lenin, characterizing the main trends prevailing in the contemporary international social democratic movement took up the following position when referring to those decades: "The struggle between the two main trends in the labour movement – revolutionary socialism and opportunist socialism included the entire period between 1889 and 1914."¹

It is well-known that the events of the 1905 revolution, the struggles of the Bolsheviks against opportunism "promoted a further demarcation between the revolutionary and reformist trends of the European social democratic parties, the emergence and development of left-wing trends."²

A centrist group, which in many respects played a buffer and a mediatory role, was formed in the Social Democratic Party of Germany, the leading party of the Second International. As for theory, the centralists declared themselves most categorically for the basic tenets of Marxism ("orthodox Marxism"), but in practice they made considerable concessions to reformism. "Kautskyism", writes Lenin, "is not fortuitous; it is the social product of the contradictions within the Second International, a blend of loyalty to Marxism in words and subordination to opportunism in deeds."³

The centrist trend assumed great significance in the international workers' movement. The most outstanding authorities of the Second International held essentially centrist views.

In Hungary, as a consequence of the relatively undeveloped class relations, there was not any such differentiation, even after 1905, in the socialist movement as there was in the German workers' movement. No such clearly distinguishable trends developed here as in Germany and some other European countries. At the political forums of the international workers' movement, the Second International, the MSzDP followed the leadership of the Second International – the Social Democratic Party of Germany, Bebel and Kautsky. Under the leadership of Ernő Garami, the 1903 programme of the MSzDP was drawn up, modelled on the 1891 Erfurt programme and it was improved on and approved by Kautsky. The most important points of this programme were:

"1. The working class can be liberated only as the result of the struggle to end class rule, that is to eliminate its base which is the private ownership of the means

¹ Lenin, V. I.: *Collected Works*, vol. 22, p. 112, Progress Publishing House, Moscow, 1964.

² *Az SzKP Története* (The History of the CPSU), p. 150, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1960.

³ Lenin, V. I.: *Collected Works*, vol. 2, p. 312, Progress Publishing House, Moscow, 1964.

of production, to take them into public ownership, and to transform the capitalist system of production into a socialist system of production.

2. The ruling class is vitally concerned with the maintenance of class-rule. Therefore, the new system can be prepared and realized only against its will by defeating its resistance. Consequently, the liberation of the working class is the historic mission of the working class itself.

3. However, the working class can only meet this historic mission through a planned and purposeful class struggle and realize it only through the conquest of political power. The means of this class-struggle are: the enlightenment of all sections of the population; the incessant dissemination of social ideas and aims; the energetic political and economic struggle and organization of the working class; in general the utilization of all means which conform with the sense of justice of the proletariat."⁴

The programme therefore rendered it necessary to liquidate the existing social system and to conquer political power. The way these tasks were to be realized was not indicated. The generality of this programme – similar to contemporary German and Austrian programmes – is particularly apparent when compared to the Russian party programme of 1903 – which obviously arose amidst different conditions. This deals concretely with the socialist revolution, adding that "The dictatorship of the proletariat is the indispensable condition of the social revolution, that is, that the proletariat must win such political power which will enable it to suppress all the resistance of the exploiters."⁵ The vagueness of the MSzDP's programme made possible and prepared for differing interpretations of its content. As for the means of struggle the party programme regarded as applicable all means "which conform with the proletariat's sense of justice". Dezső Bokányi, in his address to the congress, did not expand on this question. Even the popular explanation, written by Sándor Csizmadia at the time of the Congress, did not enlarge on it: "The present laws are the expression of the bourgeois sense of justice to which our methods can conform only insofar as they correspond to our own sense of justice."⁶

The first among the concrete political demands of the party called for: "Universal, equal and direct suffrage in every election for all citizens over twenty years of age, without discrimination as to sex. Secret voting in all communities." This was the motif of party demands in everyday politics. An examination of the various manifestations of this would seem to indicate that there had been an overestimation of the importance of suffrage, but there were realistic appraisals also and these predominated. There were some among the party leaders like Garami, Kunfi, Weltner and others, who repeatedly pointed out that from the successful

⁴ *A Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt X. pártgyűlésének jegyzőkönyve* (Minutes of the Tenth Party Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary), p. 34, Népszava Könyvkereskedés, Budapest, 1903. (MMTVD, vol. 3, Szikra, Budapest, 1955, compiled by T. Erényi, F. Mucsi and Edit S. Vincze.)

⁵ *Az SzKP kongresszusainak, konferenciáinak és központi bizottsági plénumainak határozatai* (The Resolutions of the Congresses, Conferences and Central Committee Plenary Meetings of the C.P.S.U.), vol. 1, p. 42, Szikra, Budapest, 1954.

⁶ Csizmadia, S.: *Mit akarunk. A Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt programjának magyarázata* (What We Want. Explanation of the Programme of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary), p. 20, Népszava Könyvkereskedés, Budapest, 1903.

suffrage struggle one could expect bourgeois democratic political conditions but not the liquidation of capitalist private ownership.

The fact that the demand for universal secret suffrage held such prime importance in the work of the party was, apart from its unquestionable political importance, due to other reasons as well. The social democratic leadership regarded this as the kind of demand around which broad political cooperation could be established with various bourgeois, intellectual and peasant forces.

As for the unifying aspect of the suffrage reform, Garami, writing in the party's theoretical periodical, had this to say: "The urban bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia, the small tradesmen, clerks, small-holders are equally interested in sending representatives to parliament. The present suffrage so far has made this either completely unattainable, or else granted it to the bootlickers of big agrarian interests . . . It is equally in the strict class interest of these classes to change this situation and fight for really universal and equal suffrage as it is for the workers. In fact, there undoubtedly are classes whose interests in this respect run wholly parallel with the working class, consequently universal suffrage is not even a specific socialist demand (which it never was anywhere), and will become less and less the demand of only the working class."⁷ Garami gave careful consideration to all supporters of the suffrage reform but he did not consider the other strivings of these social strata. His analysis was therefore one sided: it pointed to the necessity of social change but took into account only its suffrage-parliamentary aspects.

In reality, however, much more was involved. As a result of the economic and social development in the decade preceding the outbreak of the First World War, all the contradictions of Hungarian social development came to the surface. The peasant movements, which broke out with relatively great intensity after 1906, proved that the peasant masses demanded the bourgeois democratic solution for the land-problem. The sharpening crisis of the dualist system, the clashes of interests between the Hungarian and Austrian ruling classes, the resurgent activity of the national minorities, all pointed to the unsolved state of the national question. The national and the national minority question, as well as the agrarian one were interrelated and awaited a simultaneous solution. These were bourgeois democratic tasks. However, they came to the fore in the midst of historical circumstances when a socialist mass party already existed and the organized working class had become a significant political factor. However, the organized workers sought not bourgeois democratic but socialist achievements, that is, to end bourgeois private ownership and to socialize the means of production.

The attitude of the MSzDP's leadership towards the most important tasks was determined by the concept of socialist transformation. The essential features of the contemporary social democratic revolutionary theory were the following:

The contradictions of capitalism are leading to its downfall. The class struggle of the proletariat has to hasten this process. The organization of the working class has to, on the one hand, aim at weakening capitalist rule and restricting capitalist exploitation and, on the other, at preparing the working class for the seizure of power. As for seizing power, the leadership of the MSzDP followed, both in principles and words, the views of Karl Kautsky expressed in his "Szociális reform és

⁷ Garami, E.: *Osztályérdek és választójog* (Class Interest and the Right to Vote), *Szocializmus*, 1912–13, No. 6, pp. 244–45.

szociális forradalom" (1902) and *Der Weg zur Macht* (1909). The former work was published by the party, as translated by Ernő Garami.⁸ According to Kautsky, capitalism – depending on historical conditions – because of its own contradictions, and possibly already weakened as a consequence of future wars can be overthrown by peaceful means, by the force of political and economic organization, but it might also be necessary to use force, mass strikes, even armed action. "Social democracy has the task of coordinating the various activities of the proletariat against exploitation in purposeful, uniform actions, the culmination of which should be the final struggle to conquer political power."⁹ Garami – in a similar interpretation – considered the main task of Marxism to be the guarding of the unblemished purity of the organization and the conduct of the class struggle, holding that only by means of a revolution (which need not be violent, but may well be) waged by the working class itself can victory be attained.¹⁰

As for the alternatives of peaceful or forceful means, Kunfi also follows Kautsky's line of thinking: "The party of the Hungarian workers", writes Kunfi, "has to be organized and prepared to fight, since the Hungarian ruling classes, as in 1848, will yield to no other pressure but that of force. In the last three years the world has changed much and even the method of revolutionary struggles is different today from what it was in the past. In the arsenal of the working people the scythe has also been replaced by other equipment, although there are still many who believe that situations could arise when a straightened scythe may come in handy indeed."¹¹

Kunfi's statement – similar ones by him as well as by others could be quoted – points to the fact that to the Hungarian social democrats Kautsky's view on the use of peaceful or forceful means of struggle was not alien and neither was the opinion which essentially followed the Marxist line: "The so-called peaceful method of class-struggle which confines itself to non-military means, parliamentarianism, strikes, demonstrations, the press and other forms of pressure, are relevant in countries where democratic institutions are more effective and the populations are politically and economically knowledgeable and conscious."¹²

Therefore the party attempted to create conditions in Hungary for the peaceful realization of socialism: to establish bourgeois democratic conditions. It regarded the backwardness of the country as the greatest obstacle. It stressed that in Hungary – in contrast with the West – capitalism had still not fully developed and there was not a strong proletariat. "We are fully conscious", the famous critic József Diner Dénes wrote, "that it is the historical task of the Hungarian proletariat to transform feudal Hungary into a bourgeois-capitalist country."¹³ As a result of this they outlined two stages in the road to socialism: 1. To create a "modern

⁸ See, Kautsky, K.: *Szociális reform és szociális forradalom* (Social Reform and Social Revolution), Népszava Könyvkereskedés, Budapest, undated.

⁹ Kautsky, K.: *Der Weg zur Macht*, p. 8, Vorwärts, Berlin, 1909.

¹⁰ Garami, E.: "Revizionizmus" (Revisionism), *Szocializmus*, 1908–1909, No. 11, p. 512. (MMTVD, vol. 3, p. 247.)

¹¹ Kunfi, Zs.: "Tömegsztrájk és választójog" (Mass-strike and the Right to Vote), *Szocializmus*, 1906–1907, No. 22, p. 681.

¹² Kautsky, op. cit., p. 46.

¹³ Diner-Dénes, J.: "Pártunk taktikája" (The Tactics of our Party), *Szocializmus*, 1910–1911, No. 2, p. 51.

Hungary" (essentially a bourgeois democracy); 2. The period of bourgeois democracy "with social content", i. e., the gradual evolvement of the socialist system over a long historical period.

An examination of the Second International's history – and, within it, of German and Austrian social democracy, which strongly influenced the Hungarian workers' movement – shows that although Kautsky had waged a formally successful struggle against the views of Bernstein, in practice, though often not admitted by the competent party leaders, they were all the more asserted. This was the case in Hungary, too. The views of Marx, Engels and Lenin on Germany were pertinent to the Austrian and Hungarian social democrats too: "In a country where the bourgeois-democratic revolution was still incomplete, where 'military despotism, embellished with parliamentary forms' (Marx's expression in his *Critique of the Gotha Program*) prevailed, and still prevails, where the proletariat had long ago been drawn into politics and was pursuing a Social-Democratic policy, what Marx and Engels feared most of all in such a country was parliamentary vulgarization and philistine compromising of the tasks and scope of the labour movement."¹⁴

"Restraint" did not mean the acceptance of Bernstein's revisionism. The fact that Bernstein was defeated in the Social Democratic Party of Germany which had been regarded as a model, made it unlikely for him to win the support of the social democrats of Hungary. Besides, the Hungarian working class, which politically and materially was in a much worse situation than the German, could not be attracted by the revisionist programme. The party, therefore, siding with Kautsky, theoretically disapproved of revisionism, though – in consideration of its own political practice – it did so rather cautiously. The 'theory of peaceful transformation' had no supporters among the leaders of the MSzDP. Rather, they stressed the often repeated theory that to shun reforms could easily lead to rousing the wrath of the people and to revolution. It has often been argued that the ruling class should, in its own interest, support a policy of reforms.

The spread of the idea of convincing the ruling classes was made easier by the fact that Lassalle traditions still survived in the Hungarian workers' movement. It was Lassalle who in the 60s often stated that, as a result of the activity of the working masses, a revolutionary transformation may occur practically with the approval of the ruling classes and thus by means of suffrage struggles "the concept of the working class" could become the ruling concept of the state.¹⁵ The party upheld this Lassallean principle practically throughout the whole of its activity. The alternative of reform or revolution was not the only main question of revolutionary theory for the Hungarian social democrats; all the less so since the period under discussion was neither one of a revolutionary situation nor did the immediate possibility of revolution exist. In other words, preparations could be made for a revolutionary crisis, but a revolution could not be launched.

The question of revolution has to be approached from two sides: one, the bourgeois democratic revolution which seeks to eliminate the remnants of

¹⁴ Lenin, V. I.: *Marx, Engels, Marxism*, p. 226, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1951.

¹⁵ Lassalle, F.: *Alkotmány, szocializmus, demokrácia* (Constitution, Socialism, Democracy), p. 8, Révai Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1914. From the aspect of what has been said above, see Lassalle's lecture "A munkások és a tudomány" (The Workers and Science).

feudalism, restrict, to a certain extent, capitalist exploitation and which tries to solve the unsolved questions of 1848 and 1867, and two, the socialist revolution. One of the main contradictions of the social democratic leadership arose from the interpretation of the relationship between the bourgeois democratic and the socialist transformation. Although it stressed the need to create a "modern Hungary" and even pointed out that its achievement is the first phase of proletarian class rule, however, following the leading party of the Second International, it did not see that the socialist transformation must be preceded by the accomplishment of bourgeois democratic tasks. (Either by the bourgeois democratic revolution preceding the socialist revolution or by the socialist revolution accomplishing – as a preliminary – the necessary bourgeois democratic measures.) The MSzDP wanted to "skip" the revolutionary tasks of a bourgeois democratic transformation, referring to the supposed interests of the working class.

It is by no means easy to comprehend the relationship between the two revolutions. The difficulties above all appear in the fact that while within a greater historical perspective the bourgeois democratic and socialist aims seem to be correlated, they can hardly be harmonized within a more immediate perspective. This is manifested first of all in the relationship of the two most important problems of the bourgeois democratic transformation, the agrarian and the national questions.

In the last years of the nineteenth century the party went through a serious crisis precisely because of the agrarian question. The Congress of 1897 expelled István Várkonyi from the party, an agrarian worker, member of the party leadership, who in September 1897 formed a new party under the name of Independent Socialist Party. The new party, in keeping with Várkonyi's earlier ideas, advanced a radical peasant programme. It demanded the confiscation of all landed estates over 100 cadastral *holds* (1 c.h. = 2.27 acres) and leasing it out in five *hold* strips of land (1 h = 1.42 acres). In 1900 there was a new split in the party: Vilmos Mezőfi, a journalist, was expelled from the MSzDP, and his supporters organized the Re-organized Social Democratic Party of Hungary which defined its objective as the compulsory selling of large estates to the state and leasing it out in small parcels. Mezőfi's camp was joined by András L. Áchim, a farmer, who in 1906 founded an independent party, the Peasant Party of Hungary. His programme included the leasing of estates over 1,000 *holds* to the poor peasants.

These parties differed considerably from each other. The most radical were the "independent socialists" who were strongly influenced by anarchistic concepts. The party of Mezőfi was more markedly bourgeois democratic with a nationalistic touch. Their differences notwithstanding, the demands of the peasant parties had one feature in common: their programme, contrary to that of the MSzDP, had a "land-distributing" character. The activity of these parties led to considerable movements. In 1898 and in the succeeding years, especially in the northern part of the Trans-Tisza region, the great actions for the distribution of land were all connected with the Várkonyi-party. The "reorganized ones" were more cautious and tried, by peaceful means, to form defense organizations of the peasantry. Áchim was working on building a national peasant party until he was murdered in 1911.

The MSzDP was unquestionably affected by the organization of the peasantry. Various events abroad heightened this effect. The Russian revolution of

1905–1906 and the great Rumanian peasant revolt of 1907 also focused attention on the agrarian question. This convinced the party and primarily the left wing socialists that it was necessary to elaborate a special agrarian programme. The land-reform previously proposed by the well-known agrarian expert Arnold Dániel, then a social democrat and later a bourgeois radical, contributed to this recognition. The party congress of 1907 instructed the party executive to draw up an agrarian programme. It was worked out by a special committee, headed by Sándor Csizmadia, president of the National Federation of Hungarian Agricultural Workers. Ervin Szabó and Gyula Rácz, a sociologist, who was close to the radicals, also took part in this. The draft proposal was made public in the spring of 1908.¹⁶ Its preamble stated that the party continued to regard as its final aim the establishment of a socialist society based on the public ownership of the means of production, but it recognized that "the laws of agricultural development were not fully identical with those of industry" and therefore it "wished to conform to the expected trend of Hungarian agrarian development in the immediate future." The party based its "transitional demands" on this conclusion.

Above all, the draft demanded the "expropriation of all latifundia for the benefit of the community", which no previous programme had ever stated in such unambiguous terms, although this new draft did not define what was meant by "latifundia". The land taken into public ownership was temporarily to be managed by village communities. Autonomous village and borough corporations were to organize and control the municipalized farms. The draft also stipulated that the common land be cultivated "in conformity with local conditions" by means of "longterm or cooperative lease". This was, indeed, a new idea as compared with the party's previous theoretical attitude and practical proposals. The draft also called for the elimination of feudal conditions, for a progressive tax on land and on annual incomes of over 2,000 *koronas*, a democratic cooperative law, the planned improvement of agricultural production, consolidation of holdings, redress of the peasants' grievances against the unjust register of land in setting value for purposes of taxation, democratic civil rights and labour safety reform.

The 1908 agrarian draft programme was also more explicit as to details, more thorough and in two points considerably departed from the earlier programmes of the party. They primarily concerned the expropriation of large estates, temporarily referred to as 'municipalization', which was not included among the general and future aims, but was considered as transitional and hence the immediate task of the period preceding the socialist revolution. One of the leaders of the agricultural workers federation, Rezső Ladányi, in an article explaining the proposal, clearly expounded this aim. He said that "only a series of revolutionary acts" could lead them to their goal of collective society and the "wish to give the land, even temporarily, to those who toil it" was in that category. The other essentially new feature was the call to grant the peasantry the opportunity of long-term individual lease of land. This was due to the fact that the formulators of the programme to a certain extent took cognizance of the peasantry's new openly expressed demand for land and tried in some form to incorporate it in the pro-

¹⁶ "A Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt mezőgazdasági programja" (The Agrarian Programme of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary), *Népszava*, April 2, 1908. (MMTVD, vol. 4/a, pp. 64–67.)

gramme of the road to socialism. Had this proposal been accepted, it would have brought favourable changes in the party's policy on alliances, opening new vistas for the whole socialist movement. However, the Party Executive did not give this serious consideration, delaying even its discussion, and named a new committee to work out a programme.

At the time of sharpening suffrage struggles the Party Executive considered the whole question only from the point of view of this struggle. Zsigmond Kunfi introduced the slogan in 1909: "To the villages!" To the villages, but what for? In order that the social democratic industrial workers convince the agrarian workers and the poor peasantry of how important it was to fight for suffrage. "In Hungary, it is impossible to achieve real political results without agrarian and harvest strikes" – Kunfi said. By "real" political results he meant the struggle for suffrage.¹⁷ However, the peasant masses were not satisfied merely by the struggle for political rights and the perspective of universal suffrage.

In keeping with the general political concept of the MSzDP, the land problem was not regarded from the aspect of revolutionary development, but from that of activity aimed at achieving democratic reforms. The debate was about whether to have small or large industry, David or Kautsky, whether the proposed agrarian programme should deal mainly with the problems of the agrarian proletariat or those of small-holders. The question of the agrarian programme again became topical in 1910. In January 1911 the party leadership, urged by Ladányi and others, entrusted some social democratic party functionaries with finalizing the programme. However, they could not cope with the task. In the spring of 1911 the draft published in the press marked a retreat from the 1908 draft. The draft proposed by Sándor Csizmadia, for example, deleted the stipulations on the transitional character of the programme and the possibility of the individual leasing of farm land. One of the prominent Hungarian social democratic theoreticians, Péter Agoston, also advocated direct socialization. A social democratic leader, Kálmán Jócsák, was the only one to propose something new. He suggested that entailed estates be nationalized and given as long-lease holdings to farmers having less than ten cadastral *holds* to be joined in cooperatives. However these less significant proposals were not even presented to the Party Congress of 1911.

The new committee charged by the 1911 Congress with drawing up a programme was also unsuccessful. The party leadership almost completely disregarded the landed peasantry. Zsigmond Kunfi limited the concept of the worker-peasant alliance, following old social democratic traditions, almost exclusively to the cooperation of industrial workers and the agricultural proletariat. György Nyisztor, the secretary of the Agricultural Workers Federation and himself a former agricultural worker, went a step further. He searched for ways of cooperation with the landed peasantry and, like Ladányi, arrived at the demand for land-distribution. "If we don't want to bang our heads against a stone wall, then we must not oppose the idea of parcelling out the land." Jenő Varga, a young social democrat economist saw even more clearly the significance of breaking up large estates, because, as he stated, "the distribution of land is advantageous not

¹⁷ A Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt XVI. pártgyűlésének jegyzőkönyve (Minutes of the Sixteenth Party Congress of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party), pp. 125–146, *Népszava* Könyvkereskedés, Budapest, 1909. (MMTVD, vol. 4/a, pp. 205, 207–210.)

only from an economic but also from a general political viewpoint". However, the majority of the party leadership did not share this view.¹⁸

As for the national question, on several occasions the party, as shown by a number of theoretical statements and in the official explanation of the 1903 party programme, took a stand favouring a politically and, particularly, an economically independent Hungary, that is, against dualism, with the essential justification that such a Hungary would bring about the more vigorous development of the proletariat. "Due to the present customs union", Jakab Weltner wrote, "there is little hope of us developing into an industrial state and managing to wheedle better laws out of the ruling class than the present ones." Dezső Bokányi said of the 1903 congress draft program that "We social democrats deem it natural that Hungary, free of any outside influence – let us say Austria – should independently direct its own destiny in the political and economic field."¹⁹

However, this view was never really shared by the leading circles of the movement. Its opponents (primarily Garami) argued that an independent customs area would result in raising the cost of industrial goods which would harm the interests of the working class of Hungary. In addition, the demand for an independent tariff-zone, resulting sooner or later in political independence, would exercise an unfavourable influence on Austrian trade, harming the interests of both the Hungarian and Austrian working class. The other argument was that Austria was more developed than Hungary and to a certain extent a natural ally of Hungarian progressive forces in their fight against the "feudal oligarchy". A political break with Austria would, therefore, have harmful consequences. They even considered the possibility of a subsequent democratic socialist transformation of the whole empire, in "a great economic unit", as beneficial for all its peoples. It was in this sense that Zsigmond Kunfi formulated the 1913 party congress foreign affairs resolution condemning the Balkan policy of the Monarchy stating that "The Social Democratic Party Congress protests the constant raising of military expenditures and urges that the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy should not seek to ensure its survival by constantly raising the military burden but should pursue a new economic, social and national policy which would satisfy the broad masses."²⁰

The social democrats of Austria and Hungary cannot be reproved for the fact that they considered some sort of a democratic transformation of the Monarchy and a subsequent socialist federation of states possible. However, its propagators did not see, or rather not until very late, during the 1918 revolution, that the formation of such a federation of states was possible only if it recognized and respected the right of nations to self-determination. "Socialists cannot achieve their great aim", Lenin said, "without fighting against all kinds of national oppression. They must, therefore, unequivocally demand that the social democratic parties of the oppressor countries (particularly of the so-called "great" powers)

¹⁸ "A földosztás és a munkásság" (Land-distribution and the Workers), *Népszava*, June 7, 1914. (MMTVD, vol. 4/a, p. 701.)

¹⁹ Weltner, J.: "Gazdasági Politika" (Economic Policy). Minutes of the Tenth Party Congress of the Social Democratic Party, *Népszava*, February 12, 1903.

²⁰ Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt XX. Pártgyűlésének jegyzőkönyve (Minutes of the Twentieth Party Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary), p. 106, *Népszava* Könyvkereskedés, Budapest, undated. (MMTVD, vol. 4/a, p. 655.)

should recognize and champion the suppressed nation's right to self-determination in the specifically political sense of the term, that is, the right to political secession. The socialist of a ruling, or a colonialist nation who does not stand for that right is a chauvinist. The championing of this right, far from encouraging the formation of small states, leads, on the contrary, to the freer, fearless and therefore wider and more universal formation of large states and federations of states, which are more to the advantage of the masses and more in keeping with economic development."²¹

The situation was complicated by the fact that influential social democratic leaders, like the Austrian Viktor Adler, thought to achieve this democratization of the empire without fighting against the Habsburg dynasty, at times even with the help of the "Crown". The attitude of the Hungarian social democratic leaders toward the foreign affairs of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy derived from this concept. They held that "democratization" would also have solved the problems of the empire's foreign policy. They claimed that the Monarchy, advancing the cause of universal evolution, would exercise a strong impact on its neighbours in the Balkans. According to their economist conception the agrarian Balkans would have complemented the industrial regions of the Monarchy, providing a market for Austro-Hungarian industry.

A contributing factor was that the social democratic leaders did not reckon with the forces inherent in national movements. Although they criticized the brutal nationality policy of the Hungarian ruling classes, and their activity reflected the correct recognition that the unresolved state of the nationality question hindered the class struggle of the proletariat, they did not grasp the significance of the national and independence movements of the imperialist era. They often declared, which, incidentally, was fairly common in the international socialist movement, that the sharpening of class-antagonisms reduces national differences and contradictions to practically zero.

In the years just preceding the outbreak of the First World War, the Hungarian social democratic theoreticians attained a better understanding of the significance of the national question. At the party congress of 1913, for example, Zsigmond Kunfi stated that class-rule in Hungary "imposed in the non-Hungarian speaking people the double yoke of social and national oppression".²²

At the same time, the party executive was content with a proclamation on the need for "equality" and for "full autonomy" in state, county and village administration. The territorial integrity of historical Hungary was not open to discussion and, striving to maintain this integrity, the MSzDP dissociated itself from the idea of federation which was raised in those years and from the Bauer plan for cultural autonomy.

²¹ Lenin, V.I.: *Collected Works*, vol. 21, p. 316, Progress Publishing House, Moscow, 1964.

²² *A Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt XX. pártgyűlésének jegyzőkönyve* (Minutes of the Twentieth Party Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary) p. 272. (MMTVD, vol. 4/a, p. 660.)

The Organizational Principles of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary

As regards the Party and the Trade Unions in the period between 1900 and 1914, the organizational principles of the party were defined by the statutes adopted at the 1903 Congress, which were based on former similar documents and practice. The statutes summed up the basic requirement of party membership as follows: "1. §. Membership in the Social Democratic Party is open to all who adhere to and do their utmost to propagate its basic principles and programme and consistently support it financially and morally. A party member may not belong to, nor act in the interest of any other party. A party member is obliged to join a trade union if one exists in the trade and if there is none, the member is obliged, wherever possible, to belong to a party organization.

2. §. Local organizations determine who may be regarded as party members. A member may be expelled from the party for acting against the trade-union movement by engaging in strike-breaking. The decision of local organizations in such a matter may be appealed to the control-committee of the party, or to the party congress."²³

As can be seen from the above, the statutes stipulated the requirements of membership; in principle the concept of party and trade union membership were not identical. Trade union members were obviously not required to accept the programme and basic principles of the MSzDP. Nevertheless, it is right to speak of the party and the trade unions as being interwoven.

In the Hungarian socialist movement the relationship between the political party and the trade unions developed in a special way, differing both from the Anglo-French, and in general from the West-European and the East-European pattern. In Western-Europe the trade union movement preceded, and to some extent laid the foundation of the political movement. In Czarist Russia, on the other hand – in the illegality imposed on it by absolutism – the political organization led to the emergence of a modern trade union movement. In Hungary, prior to the political struggles of socialist workers, there were no trade unions. The trade organizations, if they can be called that, still bore the marks of the guild-industries. The first trade societies were formed simultaneously with the political organizations (The General Workers' Society, the General Workers' Party of Hungary) and were encouraged by them. After the first Congress of the MSzDP completely adopted, primarily to the credit of Pál Engelmann, the Marxist concept of trade unions, it became theoretically possible to build a Marxist party and a Marxist trade union movement. The way was clear in the sense too that, due to the backward agrarian character of the country, as compared to Western and Central-Europe, there was no liberal or Christian trade organization. The latter did begin organizing at the turn of the century, but they were never of any significance.

It is true that during the 90s the trade-union movement went through a great development in that its leading body, the Trade-Union Council, came into being. The relationship between the MSzDP and the trade unions, however, did not de-

²³ *A Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt X. Pártgyűlésének jegyzőkönyve* (Minutes of the Tenth Party Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary), p. 7, Népszava Könyvkereskedés, Budapest 1903. (MMTVD, vol. 3, pp. 127–128.)

velop entirely according to the resolutions of the First Congress and the demarcations between the local organizations of the party and the trade-unions were blurred. The reason for this can be traced back to many factors. In Hungary the right of assembly and association was not guaranteed by legislation but was regulated by government decrees. Therefore, there was no need to obtain permission to form a political party, but the party was not allowed to set up organizational units or local organizations, nor collect membership fees. Parliamentary parties, according to contemporary bourgeois concepts, were loose political groupings with a leadership group. The social democratic parties throughout Europe functioned in a different way. The Social Democratic Party of Hungary had no choice but to accommodate itself to the given circumstances but in such a way as to fulfil, despite all restrictions, the functions stemming from its character as a socialist workers' party.

The lack of bourgeois democratic freedoms influenced not only political but also economic organizing. Trade unions had to have their statutes approved by the Minister of the Interior, and they could not contain any references even to the most important trade union functions; the organization and support of wage struggles, to say nothing of political activity. The government, up to the twentieth century, permitted only the organization of local trade unions and when, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it permitted national organizations as well, the restriction on the right to strike remained in force.

It follows from the above that the sphere of activity of both the MSzDP and the trade unions was extremely restricted. It was important therefore "to invent" an organizational solution which would circumvent the restrictions on the movement and outwit official prohibitions. In speaking of this problem, the problem of illegality arises: one can presume that the socialist movement could have surmounted the restrictions of the authorities by illegal means. The contemporary Hungarian socialist movement was not compelled to carry out illegal activity such as that of Czarist Russia. The socialist movement, awailing itself of the limited legal opportunities, began its activity and continued to insist on that legality. This was justified because even a heavily controlled and restricted legality considerably facilitated the unfolding of a socialist mass-movement (like the development of the trade unions), while the surrender of legality may easily have wrecked the whole movement. At the same time, however, the government had done everything possible to prevent socialist organizing. It was usual to harass meetings and to persecute socialist agitators.

Attempts were made to introduce a new organizational form to circumvent official restrictions. Beginning with the 90s, so-called free-organizations were formed within the trade unions with approved statutes which, on the one hand, fulfilled trade-union functions, which could not be written into the statutes, and, on the other, were a substitute for the party organizations, the formation of which had been forbidden by the authorities. This way these voluntary associations, called free-organizations, formed the most important basic elements of both the party and the trade-union movements.

The report of the Party leadership to the Stuttgart Congress of the Second International in 1907 properly characterized the organizational structure of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary and the work of the free-organizations. Following a description of the activity of the free-organizations it stated that "The

free-organizations constitute the foundation of our party organization. In every locality where there are organized workers, the free-organizations of the trade unions elect stewards. These stewards constitute the local party organization, headed by the local Party Committee. These local party organizations form the county party organization. The county party organizations constitute, according to agitational districts, the district party organizations. The local party organizations send delegates to the annual party meetings, which elect the Party Executive Committee to manage the party's affairs. Prior to initiating an action the party discusses the matter with the stewards of the free-organizations of the trade unions at a conference and through them mobilizes the workers of the trade unions in the interests of the party."²⁴

Various documents – like the above-mentioned report – point to the clandestine nature of the free-organizations. However, the "secrecy" is questionable, because various bourgeois and official statements also deal at length with these free-organizations. Thus their activity was only "secret" in that they had no officially approved statutes. In fact, they can be classified as semi-legal organizations, the existence and activity of which were known to the authorities and to the public. The government tolerated their activity because, due to existing decrees, they could take no action against them, and any attack would have resulted in the radicalization of the whole trade-union and party movement. On the other hand, it was impossible for them to obtain official authorization, because they engaged in such activity which was not sanctioned in contemporary Hungary.

Even though the demarcation between party and trade-union membership was blurred in practice because of the above-mentioned function of the free-organizations, the two concepts were not identical. It cannot be claimed that every organized worker automatically became a member of the MSzDP. Besides the dues paid by union members there was an additional party membership fee. On the one hand, the free-organizations collectively paid a certain amount in membership fees to the party and in this respect they were collectively members of the party and, on the other, the most class-conscious social democrats in the free-organizations supported the political movement with individual dues as well. All this, though indicating a difference, showed that the party had a strong trade-union character.

It has to be noted that the free-organizations were active not only among industrial workers. When, particularly in the years preceding the First World War, the MSzDP began to organize the intelligentsia too and similar organizations were formed for teachers, clerks and even students. Following upon previous initiatives, they began to organize, primarily in the capital, district party organizations in keeping with the territorial principle. Agitational activity was carried on in these organizations, partly by the workers belonging to various free-organizations and partly by those, particularly professionals, who did not belong to any trade-union. In Budapest and in the larger provincial towns the "Workers' societies for self-education" had a similar role. Their membership was composed of workers and partially of professionals with social democratic sympathies.

The problem of the vanguard arises in connection with the question of organization. Because of the special organizational structure of the party – as has

²⁴ *Népszava*, August 18, 1907. (MMTVD, vol. 3, pp. 552–553.)

been shown – not every organized worker was necessarily a class-conscious social democrat. But every class-conscious worker was an organized worker. In this sense, the organized workers of Hungary, including the members of the free-organizations, constituted the vanguard of the Hungarian industrial proletariat, joined by intellectual, peasant and petty bourgeois elements, although not in large numbers.

According to the reports of the Trade-Union Council, the Hungarian trade unions in 1909 had 85,266 members and in 1912, they had 111,966 members. (The national average was 10 to 15 per cent of the working class and 30 per cent in the capital.) Before the First World War, the membership never again reached the 130,000 peak of 1906–1907. The number of women in the trade unions was small. (In 1912, 6,508.) More than half of the membership was concentrated in the capital and its vicinity. The largest trade union was the Federation of Iron and Metal-Workers of Hungary, with some 27,000 members. This was followed by the 16,000 member Union of Building Trades Workers and by the 13,000 member Wood Workers' Union. The printers' trade union was relatively strong with some 10,000 members. Of the small crafts, the tailors and the shoemakers were the best organized.

The membership of the National Federation of Hungarian Agricultural Workers dropped in 1909 from the 30,000 of the previous three years to some 1,500 as the result of official persecutions, from which it could not easily recover. In 1912 its membership rose to somewhat over 5,000. The debates on the agrarian question and the attention that the party executive paid to organizing in the provinces promoted the development of the federation but this was interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War.

There is no available information as to the classification of the trade union membership according to qualifications. However, there is every reason to believe that, as previously, the majority of the members were skilled workers. The criticisms obviously not unfounded, expressed at Congresses urged more effective organization of unskilled workers and labourers so as to eliminate this lag. In the best organized trades the number of skilled workers was relatively high. The members of the party executive and most party functionaries came from the ranks of the skilled workers. At the turn of the century some of them were already "full time" functionaries, but in the country their number hardly exceeded one hundred.

The trade union had other functions too, apart from organizing strikes. They organized demonstrations of the unemployed and paid constant attention to questions of social policy; the 1911 trade-union congress dealt with this problem in detail. (Unemployment benefits, a minimum of 15 per cent in sick benefits, compensation for accidents on the job and the reiteration of the old demands: the 8-hour work day, a full 36-hour work stoppage on Saturday afternoons and Sundays, health-service measures, etc.)

The General Consumers' Cooperative, established in 1904, acted under the auspices of the Trade-Union Council and in the first decade of the twentieth century developed into a strong institution, which effectively helped the industrial workers in buying food at reduced prices. The growing strength of the trade unions also improved the general welfare-type of activities of the organizations.

(Unemployment benefits; contributions to travel expenses; benefits to widows, orphans and the disabled, etc.)

The trade unions engaged in extensive educational activity: courses were organized with the help of party executive members, bourgeois radical scholars, socialist students and teachers. These included, on a lower level, spelling, composition, arithmetic, geometry, geography, German language and on a higher, the social sciences, economics, "natural science", social policies, literature, and the arts. Workers' literature, amateur theatricals and sports and physical training for the workers were introduced in Hungary during the decades before the First World War.

The development of the organization of the social democratic intelligentsia after 1906 was noteworthy. The Hungarian Federation of Clerks was formed in 1906. The social democratic organization of university students also progressed. The social democratic students were active in the Galilei-Circle founded in November 1908, and in 1911 they were also represented in the leadership. Beginning with the 1910s, the influence of the intelligentsia grew in the MSzDP, too. Socialist university students, journalists, lawyers, doctors, teachers, clerks held important positions in various party bodies and trade organizations.

The socialist organization of schoolteachers began in the period under discussion. A teachers periodical, *Új Korszak*, of a partly bourgeois radical and partly social democratic trend, was started in 1906. In November of the same year the Free Society of Hungarian Teachers was organized. This was also a bourgeois radical-social democratic organization. Both the periodical and the society were given a hard time by the coalition government. Count Albert Apponyi, Minister of Education, banned the paper in 1907 and refused to approve the statutes of the society. The society was permitted to function only in 1910 and the periodical again appeared in the same year. The society, having several hundred members, was very active, influencing, in addition to elementary school teachers, also secondary school masters. In the meantime, a bourgeois organization, The Hungarian Society of State-Employed Teachers, became radicalized and, moreover, this organization of some 10,000 teachers elected a social democratic president, Samu Czabán, in April 1912.

The Hungarian Women-Workers' Association and the National Federation of Young Workers, both established in 1904, also functioned under social democratic leadership. The women's organization found it difficult to make headway in factories employing girls. The situation was more favourable in the young workers' movement. The paper, *Az Ifjűmunkás*, already had a circulation of 3,500 copies in 1912. The organization of young workers during this period found its way into the large factories, too, but its base, however, continued to be the apprentice movement.

Reference has also to be made to the organizations of the MSzDP which concentrated on organizing the non-Hungarian, i. e., the German, Slovak, Rumanian and Serbian workers, the so-called "organizing committees for the nationalities". The organizations, which had been established after the adoption of the 1904 and 1906 party congress resolutions, held separate party conferences (generally annual), elected their leadership, published papers and delegated representatives to the annual congresses of the MSzDP. As the result of their activities socialist ideas penetrated the ranks of proletariat of the national minorities as well. How-

ever, this work, which entailed self-sacrifice and relatively large expenditures to organize the nationalities, was impeded by the narrow-mindedness of the party leadership. It failed to recognize the full significance of this field of activity and did not reckon properly with the proletariat of the minorities.

The committees enjoyed some sort of autonomy but acted as sections of the party. The idea of reorganizing the party on a federative basis was never raised. Such ideas, according to the leaders of the party, would have led to the party – similarly to the Austrian social democrats – being split up into loosely connected independent national minority parties. Besides rejecting the separatist endeavours, the fact that Hungary, unlike the provinces west of the River Leitha, had a unified state territory also contributed to these methods of organization. (Naturally with the exception of Croatia, which had a separate Social Democratic Party.) The federalization of social democracy would have been viewed as an attempt against the territorial integrity of the state, evoking punitive measures by the authorities. However, the maximum demands of the national minority parties (though unofficially) were merely aimed at territorial autonomy which the system of the nationality committees of the Social Democratic Party would have essentially satisfied.

Party Policy in Practice. The Struggle for Suffrage

After surveying the theoretical and organizational principles of the MSzDP the question arises: how did social democratic policy manifest itself in practice? What is most striking is the sharp and polemical method of propagating its theoretical principles. This style was one of the main features of Hungarian social democracy. The radical phraseology was in connection with the unfavourable political and economic situation of the Hungarian working masses, with their increasing bitterness.

The peculiarity of the situation in Hungary as seen by the social democratic leaders was naturally reflected in the policy of the Party, too. Additionally, the fact that the Party itself not infrequently organized large mass actions kept on the agenda the question of a general political mass strike to decide the suffrage struggle. The leaders of the Social Democrats drew a sharp line between the campaign for beneficial reforms and the revolutionary methods of struggle for revolutionary aims. While they generally supported the former, they opposed the latter because of their reformist policies. In their political practice they conceived the suffrage struggle from a reformist standpoint. This was proved, above all, by the events related to the political-governmental crisis of 1905–1906, the events of May 23, 1912 and the strike planned for March 1913.

At the general elections of January 1905, the Liberal Party, which had held power for over three decades, suffered a serious defeat. The absolute majority voted for the candidates of the coalition of opposition parties. However, the king did not call upon the victorious opposition parties to form a government but appointed an extra-parliamentary cabinet composed of his own trusted men. The opposition party coalition in its turn called for “national resistance”: to sabotage government decrees, to refuse to pay taxes, to boycott Austrian goods, etc. These events greatly sharpened the conflict between Austro-Hungarian finance-capital

supporting the Liberal Party and the agrarian and middle-bourgeoisie supporting the opposition and greatly disturbed the political life of Hungary.

The news of the outbreak of the Russian revolution stirred up the proletariat. The proletarians of Hungary hailed their “Russian brothers” at meetings and demonstrations with stormy enthusiasm. The strike-movement assumed unprecedented proportions. In quick succession the iron-workers and the workers in the gas-works of Budapest, workers in Szeged, Nagyvárad and Debrecen and the miners of Pécs had gone out on general strike.

Even those workers who had kept aloof from the movement now joined the struggle. The membership of the trade unions grew by leaps and bounds. (In 1900 there were 10,000, in 1905, 71,000 members.)

In the summer of 1905, coinciding with the struggles of the workers, fierce harvest-strikes of an unprecedented scale broke out in Eastern and Southeastern Transdanubia. Agricultural workers, tens of thousands of the poor peasantry repeatedly waged actual battles with gendarmes and soldiers sent out to break the movement. The mass struggles of the workers and poor peasants deepened even further the country's political-governmental crisis.

In this situation it depended on the MSzDP to make good use of the mass movements and turn them in the right direction. The question was whether it would be capable of directing the fighting energies of the masses toward launching an offensive against the greatest obstacles to the development of the country: the Habsburg-rule, the oppression of the nationalities, the latifundia and large capital.

The relations of the political forces were extremely complicated. The workers and the poor peasantry waged great, mainly economic struggles against the whole bourgeoisie and big landowners. The MSzDP unquestionably greatly influenced their struggle and primarily that of the working class. The peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie, on the other hand, supported the opposition coalition parties in the hope that their high sounding slogans – mainly those of the Independence Party – would be realized. However, the call for “national resistance”, issued in the summer of 1905 by the opposition party-coalition, was aimed not only at using the patriotic masses of people to serve their own aspirations for power but also, by inciting bourgeois nationalism, at drawing them away from the real national and democratic tasks.

In this critical situation the government embarked on a bold political manoeuvre. Minister of the Interior József Kristóffy, in a statement before a delegation of the MSzDP spoke of possible large-scale suffrage reforms, greater freedom of organization, and social reforms. With these promises he sought to create a social base for the government.

This manoeuvre was not ineffective. The government was able to win the support of the MSzDP and of a small section of the intelligentsia – the bourgeois radicals. The leaders of the MSzDP, instead of consistently fighting for a democratic transformation, were pacified by Kristóffy's promises – some measures which indicated tolerance of the socialist movement – and on this basis they were willing to cooperate with the government. Their attitude made it impossible to unite the democratic forces, counterposing strivings for independence, anti-feudalism and democracy.

The leaders of the MSzDP restricted the growing political fighting spirit of the working class (and partly that of the poor peasantry), which was influenced by the Russian revolution, to the struggle for suffrage. In the summer and autumn of 1905 the MSzDP organized meetings, strikes and demonstrations all over the country to bring the suffrage struggle to a successful conclusion. Outstanding among these was the one-day general strike and demonstration of the Budapest workers on September 15, 1905 ("Red Friday") for the franchise with some 100,000 participants. The working class and the poor peasantry took part in the suffrage campaign not only in Budapest but in the whole country with great enthusiasm. They interpreted this fight in their own special way, lending it the spirit of the class struggle.

The crisis of 1905–1906 passed without any benefit to the progressive forces. The Emperor compromised with the opposition, which abandoned its aims and was asked to form a cabinet. While in power, it did its best to take revenge on the MSzDP and intensified the persecution of the working-class movement, thus achieving its not insignificant radicalization. In 1907–1908 the demonstrating workers met the sabre-charges of the police more than once with gun-fire. In 1910 the coalition, losing both the favour of the King and Emperor Francis Joseph, as well as the confidence of its former voters, collapsed. It was succeeded again by Count István Tisza and his followers – this time at the head of the Liberal Party, reorganized under the name of the Party of National Work. The new government not only rejected a definite suffrage reform, but, in accord with Vienna, pursued an armament policy and initiated war preparations.

On May 23, 1912 the Party leadership organized a large demonstration with the aim of forcing the government to grant universal suffrage. The several hundred thousand demonstrators clashed in the streets of the capital with the police, and soon they not only demanded the universal and secret ballot but cheered the revolution. The clash ended with six dead and several hundred casualties. The party leadership, submitting to the threats of the government, being fearful of large-scale arrests, called upon the workers, on the very afternoon of "bloody Thursday", to desist from further demonstrations. However, they did so only after fierce rearguard fights on the 23rd and 24th. Therefore, the events were unable to run their true course, this demonstration of power did not attain the aim expected by the party leadership, nor did it influence the policy of the government. No reforms were achieved. Events in March 1913 did not even get to the mass-demonstration stage. In January 1913, the party leadership still held out the prospect of a general strike for early March – once again to win the franchise. However, when it was time to act – in the first days of March – the strike was "postponed" because of the police and military being mobilized and the aversion of the parliamentary opposition to work stoppages.

In these circumstances, strongly negative features appeared in the party's positive activity of mobilizing the masses. This was also true in the field of economic struggle. The trade-union movement succeeded somewhat in restricting capitalist exploitation, achieving good results in improving the economic and cultural situation of the workers, even heightening their class consciousness; at the same time, however, it also stimulated reformist tendencies. A kind of economism pervaded the work of the trade union leaders. Besides the attempt to defend the everyday interests of the workers and to improve working conditions, the perspective of

social change was pushed into the background. Workers' courses introduced by the party and trade unions contributed a good deal toward raising the level of the general cultural education of the workers, providing them with up-to-date scientific information, stimulating their search for knowledge, but at the same time they became trail-blazers and propagandists of evolutionist, reformist, bourgeois radical theories.

In examining the theoretical and organizational principles of the MSzDP, the question of political perspective has to be raised. The Hungarian social-democrat leaders, following the guidelines of the Second International, disregarded the Marxist critique of the Gotha programme which dealt with the dictatorship of the proletariat. According to them, the peaceful transition, the capitulation of the capitalists, the proletarianization of the majority of the population or their coming to have proletarian interests would make possible the realization of "democratic socialism". In writing about the future, even in the years before the First World War, the old Lassalleian idea of a "free people's state" frequently appeared.

A political system "permeated by the concepts of the working class" was easily reduced to a common denominator with that highly developed form of bourgeois democracy towards which the MSzDP was striving as an immediate political objective. Owing to the fact that, as a first step, the party intended, in the years preceding the First World War, to replace the existing political system, branded with the name of Count István Tisza, (primarily by means of the universal secret vote), with a bourgeois democratic type of government, the suffrage campaign remained the central issue of the political struggle.

In this struggle the MSzDP, ever since its existence, had to take two previously mentioned factors into account: on the one hand, the ruling Liberal Party and its successor, the NMP, and on the other, the strongest parliamentary opposition force, the Independence Party, which itself was a conglomeration of various trends. The traditional social democratic attitude, which only in 1905–1906 was changed for a very short time, was directed at collaborating with the relatively democratic wing of the Independence Party. At the turn of the century this conception was elaborated by such outstanding social democrats as Zsigmond Kunfi and Jenő Varga. Its essence can be summed up in the following:

The mass base of the Independents' left-wing was undoubtedly relatively more democratic than that of the government party. Although it had some adherents among the large landowners, too, its supporters were mainly middle- and small-holders, peasants, the petty-bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia.

As for its character, it was oppositionist, the preserver of the 1848–1849 Revolution and the War of Independence.

It was interested in changing the existing political situation and in the legislation of certain democratic reforms.

However, cooperation became possible only after 1910, following the downfall of the coalition government. The rapprochement was made easier when events brought about a split in the camp of the Independents. The Independents' left-wing, this time led by Gyula Justh and Mihály Károlyi, again began to oppose Ferenc Kossuth, furthering the cause of the bourgeois democratic transformation of Hungarian politics and even considered changing the traditional orientation of

foreign affairs. (A loosening of the Triple Alliance, rapprochement with the 'Entente' powers.)

Although from a political point of view the most important partner of the MSzDP was unquestionably the Independence Party led by Justh (later by Mihály Károlyi), its closest allies came from the bourgeois radicals who were organized as a party only in 1914. Bourgeois radicalism appeared in Hungary in the twentieth century. The periodical *Huszadik század* was started in 1900 and in 1901 the Social Science Society was formed. The leading figure of this trend was Oszkár Jászi. He and the bourgeois radicals sought to "modernize" the country, that is, to achieve a bourgeois democratic transformation by evolutionary means. However – and this is a most important point – in the 1910s, Jászi and his collaborators, among whom the subsequently social democratic Pál Szende was prominent, did not simply strive to attain bourgeois democracy but – and this has to be considered a specific feature – for a political system with social content which would restrict the monopolies and big capital, ensure great influence to the socialist working-class movement, a system which might have been developed in the direction of socialism.

These aims of Hungarian bourgeois radicalism ensured a suitable theoretical basis for cooperation with the MSzDP. Contributing to this was the fact that Jászi and his adherents did not wish to compete in the ranks of the working class with the social democrats but rather strove to rally the progressive intelligentsia and organize that social stratum from which they themselves had come. Thus there was a fair chance for an alliance between the social democrats and the bourgeois radicals. This was underscored by the daily paper of the bourgeois radicals, *Világ*, when it treated the events of the workers' movement sympathetically, and social democratic authors were not infrequently allowed to address the various bourgeois radical forums.

The social democrat – bourgeois radical cooperation on the one hand strengthened attempts at reformism within the workers' movement (often criticized inside the MSzDP), on the other, it popularized the MSzDP in such intellectual circles to which it otherwise would have had no access. It suffices to point out that many of the outstanding intellectuals declared their support for Jászi. The close friendship of Oszkár Jászi and Endre Ady is well known. Other intellectuals personally took part in the activity of various bourgeois radical societies: thus, for instance, the young György Lukács began his public activity in the years around 1910 in the Social Science Society.

The ties with Justh's independents and with the bourgeois radicals had a large share, for example, in the fact that, at the time of the 1912 great mass movement, prominent representatives of Hungarian cultural life sympathized with the struggle of the organized workers and of the MSzDP. The cooperation with the Justh party also raised the prestige of the workers' party in the eyes of influential peasant and bourgeois intellectuals. The fact that the daily paper of the Independentist left-wing, the popular *Magyarország*, wrote sympathetically about the earlier much criticized "international socialists", was of considerable help. However, for tactical reasons, the MSzDP made certain concessions to the nationalism of the independents: it did not touch the nationality question arising from the multi-national character of the country and it took no stand as to the demands raised by the national minority parties.

The cooperation between the Independents' left-wing, the bourgeois liberals, the radicals and the social democrats was becoming more stable in 1910–1911 and this had a solid influence on the policies of the MSzDP; it affected the events of the 1918 bourgeois democratic revolution and, in certain respects, even the Party's policies between the two World Wars. It is not surprising, therefore, that works dealing with the history of the Hungarian workers' movement generally devote great attention to this question. In 1910–1911 there obviously was a much healthier initiative than in 1905, at the time of the temporary cooperation (more precisely, attempt at cooperation) with the dynasty. One also has to bear in mind that the attempt of the MSzDP to mould the "camp of Hungarian progress" was in full accord with the political guidelines of the other social democratic parties in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In the decade before the outbreak of the First World War the social democratic parties of the Monarchy generally tried to establish some form of cooperation with democratic bourgeois forces and to harmonize this with the special class character and aims of the social democratic movement. Naturally it was not easy to achieve this harmony, and this is verified also by the history of Hungarian progressive forces. In view of the social democrats' concessions to their allies, especially to the independents, the question arises: would it not have been more appropriate if the MSzDP had sought a different type of alliance? Would it not have been better to form a coalition in which the MSzDP and not Justh's independents had the strongest influence, gathering around itself those of the independents who accepted the leading role of the workers' party as well as the democratic peasant forces and the equally democratic national minority (Slovak, Rumanian, Serbian) parties?

A coalition of this kind would have been a theoretically purer and more progressive formation. However, it is questionable whether it could have been realized. The cooperation of the social democrats with the nationalities and the peasant organizations would hardly have made it possible for Justh and his immediate collaborators to take part in the opposition coalition. However, there was no perspective for the social democrats to form a government without them, to say nothing of the fact that it would have lacked the masses that Gyula Justh's party represented. Therefore, the involvement of new elements in the coalition would have created the danger of no less important elements leaving it.

But let us go further. Some of the democratic peasant parties, which were active in the decade prior to the outbreak of the First World War, as has been mentioned, had their origin in the MSzDP and took different courses only because of its agrarian policy. The MSzDP cooperated with these parties in the struggle for universal secret suffrage, but forming stronger ties was made difficult by two hardly avoidable factors. One of these was the fact that there were two different views on the agrarian question: approval or rejection of land distribution and the other being the rivalry attending the organizational activity amongst the agrarian proletariat. The MSzDP and the peasant parties each tried to win over the landless agrarian population and these endeavours naturally conflicted with each other. The Farmers' Party (the predecessor of the Smallholders' Party) founded in 1908 and led by István Nagyatádi Szabó was not as democratic as the above-mentioned peasant parties. It was the organization of the well-to-do peasantry and it categorically rejected socialist aims; however, in the suffrage struggle even Nagyatádi Szabó was willing to cooperate with the social democrats to a certain

extent. Probably, he would not have been willing to do more even under different circumstances.

As for the Slovak, Rumanian and Serbian national parties in Hungary, various differences arose at the turn of the century with the emergence of the bourgeois democratic-radical wing. (This trend was represented amongst the Slovaks by M. Hodža, who was associated with Masaryk, amongst the Rumanians by O. Goga and amongst the Serbs by J. Tomić, etc.) The MSzDP could undoubtedly have developed more systematic cooperation with the left wing of the national minorities in the struggle for bourgeois democratic freedoms and reforms had they cared to do so. However, cooperation was, on the one hand, frustrated by the nationalism of the national minorities and, on the other, as already stated, it was naturally blocked by the nationalism of Justh and his supporters. (Justh, for example, would never have agreed to the attempts of the national minorities to achieve the territorial autonomy they desired, but never officially declared.) It would therefore have been impossible to bring together Justh, Garami and Goga into one camp, nor would the leaders of the national minorities have been any more willing to accept the leadership of the social democrats than were the Hungarian independents. The forces which backed them were in the main petty-bourgeois, peasants and intellectuals. The left-wing exponents of the national minority parties – although they agreed on the fight for bourgeois democratic freedoms – also had certain reservations about the MSzDP. They criticized the party's socialist objectives and did not approve of its agitational activity among the national minority proletariat. In this field the national minorities' leaders fought against the social democrats with nationalistic arguments ever more successfully. This was made much easier by the erroneous agrarian policy of the MSzDP.

All these circumstances explain the emergence and activity of the given form of Hungarian progress. The fight carried on by Hungarian progression did not lead to direct results. Tisza, supported by the Hungarian ruling circles and the dynasty, proved more powerful. His position in the fateful summer of 1914 became even stronger. Nevertheless, in the terms of the political struggle, the fifteen years preceding 1914, though without tangible results, cannot be deemed as having been fruitless. The great mass suffrage demonstrations of 1905–1906 and of 1908 and 1912, exceeding their original program, virtually became revolutionary demonstrations because of the radicalization of the masses which was due largely to the obstinate resistance of the ruling circles. Such actions were undoubtedly suitable for intensifying the political activity of the masses. If to this is added the results of the trade union struggles, the mass strikes which resulted in improvements of the cultural and material wellbeing of the working class and in general the increased authority of the social-democratic movement throughout the country, then the features foreshadowing progress become apparent and thus it is not surprising that contemporaries, though embittered by Tisza's predominance in June 1912, and his breaking of the filibuster in parliament, did not lose hope.

The outbreak of the World War obviously created a new situation. By the autumn of 1918 the war years had brought to a head the long overdue bourgeois democratic transformation. And then, as a direct consequence of 1911–1912, the idea of a social democratic and bourgeois democratic coalition became a reality.

The Workers' Opposition in the Social Democratic Party of Hungary

The ineffectiveness of the suffrage struggles led to discontent inside the party and contributed to the emergence of various new opposition trends. As early as 1905, Ervin Szabó demanded curtailment of the party leadership's prerogatives and the extension of party democracy. At that time, however, he still adhered to the theoretical-political framework set by the party. At the request of the party, Szabó undertook to prepare for publication, with commentary, the selected works of Marx and Engels, for the first time in Hungary. Two volumes were published (1905, 1909) of the three that had been planned. The third volume was not published because of the sharpening political disagreement he had with the party. The elements of syndicalism which had always been present in the views of Ervin Szabó came into full sway in the years following 1905. In his work *Szindikalizmus és szociáldemokrácia* (Syndicalism and Social Democracy), which was published in 1908, he pointed out that the central issue of the contemporary international social-democratic movement was the suffrage-parliamentary struggle. He stated that various trends might differ in interpreting the theoretical theses "but in the question of parliamentary politics, in the demand for a so-called minimal programme they are all of one mind. The social democratic parties confine their activity solely to the fight for parliamentary political democracy." "This explains," he added "why the political workers' movement, social democracy, is stronger precisely in those countries which are backward in social and political democracy." However, bourgeois democratic conditions in themselves are not enough for the liberation of the working class though they may create more favourable conditions for the struggle. The social democratic movement had to face the question: "Should it adhere to the well-trodden path, which obviously was that of bourgeois democracy, or has it the strength to substitute its old programme and traditional forms of action for new concepts and new methods of struggle?"²⁵

Ervin Szabó displays some profound perceptions in his writings. The description of the struggle for bourgeois democracy as the great stimulant of the social-democratic movement the apprehension of the dead end of bourgeois democracy and the urging for "new concepts" and "new methods of struggle", all pointed to actual problems. Ervin Szabó, by rejecting both Bernstein's revisionism and Kautsky's centralism, pinpointed the maturing crisis of social democracy and attempted to answer the emerging questions. He arrived at the conclusion that the grounds for the existence of the political party of the working class was the struggle for parliamentary democracy. He held that the only effective weapon to achieve socialist conditions was "the revolutionary trade-union movement". He regarded French syndicalism as the example to be followed or, more precisely, to be further developed: "The French trade unions have found new ways and means for the political struggle of the working class: direct action and anti-militarism."²⁶

Ervin Szabó formulated even more precisely the tasks of the working-class movements in his work *Szindikalizmus* (Syndicalism), published in 1910 with the subtitle *Kiáltvány Magyarország Munkásságához* (Manifesto to the Hungarian

²⁵ Szabó, E.: *Válogatott írásai* (Selected writings), p. 265, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1958.

²⁶ Op. cit., p. 280.

Workers). The manifesto accepted the need to fight for bourgeois democracy but took issue with the idea of making the trade unions an instrument of the MSzDP's suffrage struggles. He outlined the concept of "direct action" and stated that "all this will lead to a point when the workers, in a great general strike embracing the whole country, will confront capitalist society with the final decisive struggle." The "particular specific aim" of the trade unions was to prepare the general strike "which, once successful, can be followed by nothing else but the socialist society."²⁷

Ervin Szabó was an ardent revolutionary, but, as shown by history, he searched in the wrong direction for the path towards a socialist society. Neither "direct action" nor the general strike led to the destruction of capitalist society anywhere. The onesidedness and contradictory nature of his ideas prevented Ervin Szabó from attracting the worker masses. It was primarily his friend, Count Ervin Batthyány, a large estate owner, who denounced the immorality and decay of the existing social order and tried to give the maximum publicity to the syndicalist school of thought as influenced by his anarchistic theory of the state. Influenced by Ervin Szabó, the anarchist Batthyány drew, for a short time, nearer to syndicalism. In February, 1907, he launched the periodical *Társadalmi Forradalom* and made contact with those oppositionists who were increasingly dissatisfied with the ineffective suffrage policy of the party leadership. Gyula Mérő, a lawyer and journalist, was one of these oppositionists. He believed that "revolutionary socialists are not anti-parliamentarians," but only demand that the parliamentary activity of the social democrats "be conducted in strict accord with the class struggle"; "parliamentarism, as one of the weapons of the workers, should not be constantly advanced at the expense of other weapons; on the contrary, the struggle of the workers should primarily be manifested in the economic field, in direct action".²⁸ This was a sharp criticism of the party leadership's policy from 1905 onwards, but it was also still far from the doctrinaire concept of anarcho-syndicalism.

Since Szabó and Batthyány were unable to win support in the MSzDP, anarcho-syndicalism influenced only a very narrow circle. A group of some fifty people calling themselves "revolutionary socialists" was formed in 1907 in Budapest mainly to disseminate anarcho-syndicalist propaganda. However, the group could make no headway amongst the industrial workers and, with the exception of a few factory workers, consisted of workers employed as artisans, shop clerks and *declassé* elements. In the years preceding the outbreak of the First World War the group continued to decline and in 1914, after Ervin Szabó withdrew from the movement, it ceased to function. Ervin Szabó himself was persuaded only by the war to resume political activity and even to undertake revolutionary action.

Gyula Alpári, the young social democrat journalist, was also prompted by the problems of the suffrage struggle to oppositionist activity. Alpári, writing toward the end of 1908 in the organ of the left-wing of the German social democratic party, accused the Hungarian social democrat party leadership of being content with a limited suffrage reform and with a few seats in parliament. His criticism drew attention to the fact that the social democratic leadership, though speaking

of universal secret suffrage, was actually prepared to accept more modest reforms. He rightly pointed out that behind the militant resolutions of the various congresses there lurked a policy ready for manoeuvres and compromise.

Alpári's criticism, however, was not without exaggerations. The party leadership never renounced the principle of universal suffrage. That it would have temporarily been satisfied with less was due to the fact that it was compelled to accept reality. Its opportunism was evidenced in the fact that the party first adapted itself to the "Dragoon Government" (the unpopular Hungarian government of 1905), and later to the manoeuvrings of the parliamentary opposition. However, not even Alpári could free himself from the lure of the suffrage policy and he, too, came to regard the fight for "universal secret" suffrage as the central question of social democracy. But unlike the party leadership, he relied only on the forces of the proletariat and regarded any cooperation with bourgeois elements as "pact politics", which he rejected.

Alpári objected to cooperation not only with bourgeois but also with peasant groupings. His outlook was influenced by Luxemburgism. During his stay in Germany in 1907-1908 he was in direct contact with the German left-wing and familiarized himself with the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg. In these he understandably discovered the revolutionary spirit of class struggle without, however, noting its incorrect theses which would isolate the workers' movement. Luxemburgism rejected bourgeois democratic aims and in this respect its ultra-radical theses naturally prevented the Alpári opposition from correcting the mistakes and rectifying the omissions of the party leadership regarding the task of the Hungarian bourgeois democratic transformation. Thus the opposition led by Alpári theoretically did not go beyond the declarations of the 1903 party programme; its activity made no impact on the theoretical basis of social democratic politics.

Anti-militarism had played an important role in the political propaganda of the opposition. Alpári, as one of the founders of the young workers' movement in Hungary, attributed great importance to anti-militarist struggle. He correctly noted that the most important basis of the policy of the party leadership were the trade unions, which were organizationally bound up with the party. This was why he insisted that the party and the trade unions be separated. He believed that a reorganization of the party on the German pattern and freeing the trade unions from the influence of the party leadership would enhance the effectiveness of the movement's militant policy of class struggle.

Alpári and his closest associate, János Hirossik, and their adherents were able, in the course of their activities, to make some headway primarily in the youth movement, in a few trade unions and in one of the most important party organizations (in the VIIIth district) of Budapest. For the party leadership, the appearance of the opposition spelled a danger which had not been present for at least ten years. This motivated the party leadership to take more drastic measures against Alpári.

The matter was put before the party congress of April 1910 on the grounds that Alpári had been attacking the party policy in various German left-wing social democratic papers. A motion of expulsion was approved by the congress, though many delegates opposed it, among them Zsigmond Kunfi, who was a member of the party executive. The matter was again discussed in the summer of 1910 by the

²⁷ Op. cit., pp. 330-331.

²⁸ *Népszava*, August 14, 16 and 17, 1906. (MMTVD, vol. 3, p. 488.)

appeals court of the International Bureau of the International, which, over the protests of Lenin, Luxemburg, Zetkin and others, approved the expulsion.

Alpári and his associates, seeing that they could not continue their activity in the MSzDP, attempted, in the spring of 1911, to form a new party. Their paper, the *Szociáldemokrata*, published in March 1911 the appeal of a "preparatory committee of twenty-five" calling for the formation of a new workers' party. However, the attempt to form a new party failed. The opposition could not persuade a sufficiently large number of organized workers to break away from the MSzDP.

Besides the opposition, which had gathered around Ervin Szabó and Gyula Alpári, that is, outside the framework of the MSzDP, considerable activity was carried on by those party functionaries who periodically criticized the tactics and methods of the party leadership from within the party; Lajos Tarczai, Béla Vágó, Jenő László, Gyula Hajdu and Jenő Landler criticized, as did Alpári, the party's policy of accommodating various bourgeois considerations and urged that an independent socialist position be developed. The criticism of the left-wing elements inside the party was generally correct. They did not minimize but rather stressed the significance of a socialist party of the working class. Even as to the relationship of the party and trade unions, they showed an awareness of the positive factor, that of preserving the social-democratic character of the trade unions. Taking objective difficulties into account, they demanded that the party create a wider base for an independent social-democratic policy by engaging in dedicated organizational activity among the agrarian proletariat and the workers of various nationalities.

The very fact that Landler and the others had been active in the party and had held important party functions aided the practical implementation of their criticism. It was largely due to their criticism that between 1906–1910, when the coalition government was in office and later, too, the party leadership organized radical mass-activities and, despite real objective difficulties, its agitation was more vigorous.

The weakness of the opposition and the laxity of organization were due not only to the theoretical-political inadequacy of the various groups but also to the policy of the party leadership. The fact that the leadership of the MSzDP condemned Bernstein's revisionism, at international forums supported centralism and that it enjoyed the confidence of the most prominent contemporary leaders in the international worker's movement (Bebel, Jaurès, Plekhanov etc.) also influenced the opposition as well as the organized workers. The apparent radicalism of the party leadership, the great mass-actions it organized, and the retaliatory measures of the authorities, all led the majority of the organized workers, constituting the party's base, to the conclusion that a new social-democrat policy was not, in principle, realistic at the given time. This accounts for the fact that some groups of the opposition, after having been expelled from the party, felt uprooted and were unable to achieve any appreciable results. Years later, however, during the revolutionary crisis caused by the war, the situation changed and the strengthened social-democratic opposition became one of the main factors of Hungarian political life.

In the summer of 1914 the MSzDP was not a part of the noteworthy minority of the International but of its majority, which adjusted to and supported the war. Its

attitude was naturally greatly affected by the general view prevailing in the Second International; chiefly the standpoints of the German and Austrian social democrats. The views of those two parties are so well known that there is no need to repeat them. However, the attitude of the MSzDP had its own specific causes and specific features.

The attitude of the Hungarian social democrats towards the empire in the Danubian Basin had, from the outset, been contradictory. The first Hungarian social democrats had already personally experienced the absence or limitation of bourgeois democratic freedoms as well as the lack of social legislation. The feudal arrogance of the dynasty, the extensive royal prerogatives, the cold, autocratic personality of Emperor Francis Joseph were all unpopular with the workers. This also held for the "joint" state apparatus of the empire, particularly of the army, whose drill was well-known to practically everybody. The Hungarian social democrats, moreover, never concealed the fact that though they considered as fundamental the relations of production and the class point of view, in principle they regarded the republic as a more democratic form of government than the monarchy. The MSzDP, as a legal organization, could not – under contemporary Austro-Hungarian conditions – be outspokenly anti-monarchist. As for the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy the Hungarian social democrats, as has been pointed out, had, from the first, precluded its partitioning. This opinion conformed with the idea of the advantages deriving from "a great economic unit" and the rational opposition to national territorial division. Such being the case, even in the early period, due mainly to the activity of Leo Frankel, the demand was raised for the workers' movement to transform the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy into "a free federation of free peoples".

At the time of the international crisis immediately preceding the outbreak of the First World War the MSzDP had a more pessimistic and more critical estimation of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy than previously. This was also due to the disillusionment with the dynasty itself, to the resurgence of Ballhausplatz aggressiveness and to the revival of various national movements. The opinion that democratization could save the empire was still being expressed but with less conviction. This was proved by an article which appeared in April 1914 in *Népszava*, probably written by Zsigmond Kunfi.²⁹

This article stated that "Austria-Hungary is not a natural formation from the geographic or from the ethnic point of view. The question is posed by all as to what it is for, why it exists in this world? The existence of other states is justified by their mere existence; for our monarchy special reasons are needed to justify its existence. When the people of a country are badly off, it is said that something has to be done to improve their lot. However, regarding the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, everybody thinks that it has somehow to be changed, partitioned, split-up. The people have lost confidence in the need for and in the vitality of the Monarchy."

Although this was quite clearly seen, the party did not draw the necessary conclusions. It saw how critical the situation was but did not reckon with the nearness of the disintegration. Moreover, the criticism was not only of the empire but also

²⁹ "A monarchia léte és fennmaradása" (The Existence and Survival of the Monarchy), April 27, 1914. (MMTVD, vol. 4/a, pp. 691–692.)

of the national minority movements which wanted to break it up. The social democrats equated the nationalism of the latter with Hungarian nationalism. Very rarely did they draw any distinction. Thus, Kunfi stated at the 1910 party congress, in agreement with Oszkár Jászi's conception, that the national minority parties, as for their basis and interests, were undoubtedly more democratic formations than the Hungarian historical parties. However, his initiative did not change the main line of social-democratic policy since, as has been seen, this trend relied primarily on the Hungarian parliamentary opposition and hoped to overthrow the Tisza-cabinet with its assistance.

A contributing factor to all this was the anti-militarist policy of the social democrats, which increased during the Balkan wars. Following the Basel conference, in November 1912, there was, for example, a huge anti-war demonstration in Budapest, at which Dr. Karl Liebknecht was the main speaker.³⁰ The meeting not only opposed the war but also cheered the republic. Subsequently the policy of the party conformed with the resolutions of the Basel congress. Following the assassination in Sarajevo (June 28, 1914), *Népszava* seized every opportunity to condemn Austro-Hungarian imperialism. This sharp anti-militarist tone characterized the Hungarian social-democratic press until war was declared. On July 29, after war had been declared on Serbia, the party leadership issued an appeal which called upon the working class to adapt itself to war conditions and preserve its present organizations. The basic motif of this appeal was that nothing could be done anymore and that the unalterable had to be accepted. The tone changed once again when the World War broke out, after the Russian declaration of war in early August, and arguments were presented to justify the fight against Czarism, which essentially agreed with the German social democratic standpoint at the time. These were clearly the manifestations of social-chauvinism.

Instead of dwelling on these well-known arguments, the question should rather be posed as to the cause of this change. The same question, as verified by the material in the editorial archives of *Népszava*, was being put to the party leadership by many organized workers.³¹

There is no doubt that pressure from the authorities had much to do with these changes. Nor can it be doubted that opposition to the war would have been followed by the rescinding of the legal status of the party and trade unions, but after several decades of legal activity a retreat into illegality would have been inconceivable and unrealizable for the reformist party leadership. The government could have easily enforced its will since it had prepared in advance for a state of war and for militarization, to say nothing of the fact that the nationalist frenzy would have facilitated the acceptance of its measures by the public. The fact is, nevertheless, that the social democrat leadership capitulated to pressure.

This capitulation was also due to other factors, which the leaders of the party expounded on various occasions. Most interesting in this context was a lengthy article by Ernő Garami, which appeared in the theoretical periodical of the party. Garami stated that "the International was too weak to prevent the war" which in itself made the application of the Stuttgart and Basel resolutions impossible.

³⁰ *Népszava*, November 26, 1912. (MMTVD, vol. 4/a, pp. 563–564.)

³¹ PI Archives, *Népszava*, 1913–1914. Published in MMTVD, vol. 4/a. Edited by Ferenc Mucs, János Kende, Tibor Erényi, Edit S. Vince, pp. 111–113, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1969.

Moreover: "The fact of war is one thing, the danger of war another." A unilateral move against the war in the individual countries would have facilitated an enemy invasion (thus Hungary would have been exposed to eventual occupation by the Czarist forces) and would have been synonymous with a programme of "self-defeat". It was obviously nonsense to follow such a programme according to Garami. Jakab Weltner agreed with this. His starting point was that the leading parties of the International were incapable of united action. "The economic organization and political weight of the various social democratic parties differ, so that the use of revolutionary means would have prevented the preparations for war only in some countries which then would have fallen easy prey to states where war preparations could be sufficiently developed after suppressing the workers' movements".³²

Thus precisely the most brutal forces would have gained the advantage. This argument of the party leaders was definitely reformist. Striking proof of this can be found in what Garami and Lenin had thought of the slogan of "self-defeat". However, the shameful social-chauvinist period of the MSzDP was of short duration. Various documents of 1915 and, even more, of 1916 prove that the 1914 view which closed this period had been modified, and pacificism prevailed.

What was the attitude of the opposition to the war? Ervin Szabó's antimilitarist activity began only in 1915. In his writings following the outbreak of the war he still approved of the principle *salvus belli, suprema lex*.³³ Some months later, however, *Szocializmus*, in its 1914–1915 number, published an article entitled "Marx, Engels és a háború" (Marx, Engels and the War), which was, although historical, addressed to the problems of the present and which took an unambiguous attitude towards proletarian internationalism.

Although Alpári had maintained his antimilitaristic attitude, he did not actively oppose the war until 1917. As for the left-wing of the party, György Nyisztor, in the May 8, 1915 issue of the social-democrat paper *Világ szabadság*, criticized certain statements in Ernő Garami's above-mentioned study. He pointed out that the leading parties of the International "could have done much more to prevent the outbreak of the war". Furthermore: "If we say that the war does not serve the people's interest, then we cannot cheer the war."

It is important to dwell on the 1914 standpoint, since it had far-reaching consequences. This can be summed up in the following: The approval of the war in the summer of 1914 had deeply shocked a large part of the workers – even more than the earlier blunders. There undoubtedly was an upsurge of nationalism, but in the particular situation of Hungary, where full national independence did not exist and which had a multinational character, the "joint affairs" the much lower living standard of the workers here than in the West, and last but not least, because of the previous internationalist propaganda of the MSzDP, the working class was not completely overcome by nationalism, not even in the first days, not to speak of what was to come later when, under the impact of a protracted war, a sobering process set in.

³² *Szocializmus*, August 1914 – May 1st, 1915, pp. 443–444. Garami, E.: "Az Internacionále és a háború" (The International and the War), *Szocializmus*, March, 1916, p. 38. Weltner, J.: "Válságok" (Crises), *ibid.* (Selections from Garami's article are published in MMTVD, vol. 4/b, pp. 92–97.)

³³ Szabó, E.: "A háború és a gazdasági élet" (War and Economic Life), *Husadik század*, July–December 1914, p. 180.

In 1914, as has been pointed out, the party's authority was shaken but it did not totally compromise itself. This never occurred, since, having no members in parliament and no ministers, the MSzDP could preserve its non-participating position more than the German, French and English workers' parties. The allusion to the pressure of the authorities could also sound more convincing than in the bourgeois democratic countries. Finally, it should not be forgotten that the social-chauvinistic period was of relatively short duration. The above-mentioned factors enabled the party leadership from 1915 on, at home and abroad, to point to its "consistent" opposition to the war. This, as has been seen, had no foundation and only the above-mentioned factors made it somewhat acceptable to the masses. An ever deeper economic, social and political crisis, however, made it, despite all serious efforts, impossible for the party to come through the war years without its own deep crisis.

It would not be amiss to assert that an appraisal of the historical path of the MSzDP, and specifically of the phase discussed here, is one of the most debated problems concerning the history of the Hungarian workers' movement. As a result of fifteen years' research of source material and monographic works, Hungarian historians have crystallized a general view which has also been reflected in various syntheses, at least as concerns the period in question. Although occasionally we can still see the use of overly severe historical standards and there may at times occur an overestimation of the strength and opportunities of the MSzDP or traces of the view which hold the Party responsible for all wrongs, the concept is outdated, nevertheless, that the activity of the MSzDP, as a result of reformism and the ensuing opportunism verging on social-chauvinism, was entirely negative. It cannot, however, be said that this activity, not to speak of the 1914 low point, could stand the judgment of history. The serious consequences of unrealistic ideas, political failures and compromises are much too evident.

There are today, however, a great number of published source materials, collections of party programmes – some of them quoted above – which can already at first reading convince any interested reader that even according to the current concept of progress the MSzDP was the most progressive political force in Hungary, the only political force which sharply criticised and sought to end capitalist, private ownership. It educated the working class in internationalism and disseminated the ideas of socialism. These endeavours were accompanied by significant, though contradictory theoretical and political activities. The forces fighting for the bourgeois democratic and socialist transformation of Hungarian society could always draw and did in fact draw on the example of the activity of the MSzDP in the quarter century before the war. Whether they were the peasant organizations at the turn of the century, or Hungarian bourgeois radicalism, they had all, during the full course of their activities, been connected with social democracy, which even had a good share in their formation, and we may well be right in regarding this feature as specifically Hungarian.

The Historical Path of the Emergence of the Hungarian Party of Communists

by

György Milei

When examining the genesis of the Hungarian communist party, we are not considering the origin of just one of the many Hungarian parties but of the only one which throughout its fifty years' history has relentlessly fought for the interest of the Hungarian working class and the working people. Under its leadership, in the course of the last quarter of a century, a backward country has been dynamically developed, becoming the home of millions of people who used to be deprived of their rights. This is why both researcher and reader are justified in raising the question: why, how, from what sources, with what aims, through what struggles did the initiator of the Hungarian communist movement – the Hungarian Party of Communists (KMP) emerge. These are the questions we shall deal with.

Historical Conditions for the Formation of the KMP

Hungary participated in the First World War on the side of Germany as part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The Hungarian ruling classes – the monarchist landowners and capitalists – had hoped that victory would strengthen the system of the Monarchy and within it that of Hungary, which was threatened by social and national antagonisms and thus be able to overcome the sources of tension and gain new territories. However, the war ended with the victory of the Entente countries and the catastrophic defeat of Germany and Austria-Hungary. The decaying structure of the Monarchy was unable to repel the social and national centrifugal forces which, owing to the destruction, misery and oppression caused by the war, gained considerable strength and in late October and early November the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy disintegrated. The so-called "historical Hungary" also fell apart. The largest part of the country inhabited by national minorities (and partly by Hungarians) seceded.

In the decades prior to the collapse, the remnants of feudalism in Hungary, just as in some other Central and East European countries, had still been a heavy burden on the capitalist economic and social system which had achieved a relatively high stage of development. In Hungary the dominance of the capitalist relations of production, indeed, the development of imperialism had created the objective economic and social conditions for a socialist revolution. After the turn of the century, the nation was faced with a twofold task: the completion of the still unsolved bourgeois democratic transformation and the solution of long overdue socialist tasks. These two tasks had overlapped and intertwined and their con-

traditions emerged forcefully as the manifestations of the general crisis of the capitalist system as a result of the impact of the first imperialist world war, the 1917 Russian Revolution and other revolutionary movements throughout Europe. Due to the inter-relatedness of the big bourgeoisie and the large land-owning class and their manifold community of economic and political interests as well as a consequence of the threatening danger of the concrete example of a socialist revolution since November 1917, the Hungarian bourgeoisie was not inclined to carry out consistently and in a revolutionary manner the solution of bourgeois democratic tasks. The conservative bourgeois parties in power, (particularly the Work Party led by Count István Tisza and the Constitution Party led by Count Gyula Andrássy) had done their best to maintain unalterably their rule, with either insignificant or no concessions at all to the oppressed classes and nationalities. Their intransigent resistance to reforms and use of unstrained force against the working masses and the national minorities, a war waged to an ignominious end, an obstinate adherence to the Monarchy and the German alliance – had rendered it impossible for either peace or a bourgeois transformation to be achieved by means of reforms. Only the revolutionary drive of the masses could sweep away the ruling system of old Hungary from the path of progress and peace.

The bourgeois opposition parties which had more or less sympathized with the need for bourgeois progress (particularly the Independence and 48'ers Party led by Mihály Károlyi, and the National Bourgeois Radical Party of Oszkár Jászi), persevered, however, only in favour of rather inconsistent reforms to be initiated from above and constitutionally implemented. They too, though in varied forms, insisted on the territorial integrity of Hungary; they opposed the participation of the revolutionary forces in the fight for peace and social change, fearing that the fight would go beyond the bounds of the bourgeois order. These parties hoped that they would lead the floundering country out of the crisis, with the support of the victorious allied powers.

In this situation it was the working class that had to defend the real interests of the whole nation, to ensure its development and in a revolutionary consistent manner carry out the bourgeois democratic tasks. Only thus could it clear the way towards a socialist revolution. In 1917–1918 the fulfillment of this obligation could not be postponed especially since the beginnings of a revolutionary spirit and a revolutionary crisis were felt throughout the country. Toward the end of October 1918 a bourgeois democratic revolution developed in the country when, in the wake of the Russian revolutions, the tasks of the Hungarian proletariat also became more perceptible. The key question of social progress then became whether or not the only party of the Hungarian working class, the Social Democratic Party of Hungary (MSzDP) will prove to be that organized force which in the international and internal revolutionary situation would perceive the possibility and need for a *revolutionary* solution of the tasks ahead; will it recognize the opportunity of transforming the bourgeois democratic revolution into a socialist revolution; will it understand the leading role of the working class and will it be able to mobilize and involve in the struggle those other forces which are indispensable to such a transformation?

In the first decades of the century other parties of the international workers' movement had been faced with similar problems. They were also seeking the ways to solve them but they took only the first, initial steps. It was the Bolshevik Party,

founded and guided by Lenin, that since the turn of the century was in the vanguard of this process and led the Russian workers' movement in the particularly difficult struggle against czarism. Other detachments of the international proletariat – including the socialists of Hungary – were caught unprepared by the unexpected force of this revolutionary upheaval. This is why the understanding and application of Leninism, "Bolshevism", became the key question of the progress of the international workers' movement.

Apart from the general questions of the period of imperialism, Leninist theory provided answers to a number of specific problems of Hungarian society, because of the similar economic and social conditions of Hungary and Russia. Therefore information about the strategy and tactics of the Bolsheviks afforded more significant help than the international movement had ever had in defining Hungarian tasks. Hence the question arose as to whether the leaders of the MSzDP, who so far only had regard for the Austrian and German social democrats, would ever be able to make use of this help, or whether there were other forces in the movement capable of understanding and utilizing those theories of Bolshevism which were valid for Hungary as well.

The leaders of the MSzDP – faithful to the principles of the 1903 programme – professed themselves to be avowed adherents of socialism but considered its realization in Hungary a matter for the distant future. They regarded the Russian proletarian revolution as an anomalous peculiar phenomenon with which they sympathized without needing to follow its lessons and experiences.

Under the direct influence of October 1917, the leaders of the MSzDP were also preoccupied with the possibility of revolution and the close relatedness of the two revolutions. At a special conference on November 25, 1917, Sándor Garbai, a member of the party leadership, spoke enthusiastically of the Russian revolution. He compared it to a well-stoked engine which had left St. Petersburg and to which – he said – every social democratic party hitches its carriages. As for the character of the approaching revolution, he referred to the possibility of two revolutions: "Bourgeois society is aware that here we seem to be not only faced by a bourgeois revolution but also by a social one."¹

The leaders of the MSzDP, after a momentary enthusiasm reverted to their "sober judgement". The party leadership in subsequent declarations and actions avoided the idea of revolution and only to refute it did they refer to the close relatedness of the two revolutions.

It was in this spirit that they took a stand at the extraordinary conference held on February 10, 1918. The members of the party leadership tried to appear before the dissatisfied masses of workers as supporters of Bolshevik ideas and means and as Zsigmond Kunfi, one of the best-trained left-wing centrist members of the leadership said they would, if necessary, avail themselves of them. However, they quickly added that it was still not possible to apply them. Jakab Weltner, one of the leaders of the Party, politically to the right of Kunfi, insisted in his address: "We are fully convinced that the social order in Hungary is, for the present, not being threatened." He spoke of dreamers and Garami, a representative of the

¹ OL, ME XVI. res. 1917–7990. Police records of the special conference of the MSzDP on November 25, 1917.

right wing, spoke of a revolutionary monomania on the part of those "who try to apply Bolshevik methods and means in Hungary".²

The members of party leadership, reverting to the practice of the previous years urged the resumption of the campaign for suffrage rights as a concrete programme. They hoped to achieve the democratic transformation of the country and peace in this way.

The leaders of the MSzDP failed to recognize the revolutionary tasks facing Hungarian society and the proletariat and they were incapable organizing and leading the proletariat. With an opportunistic policy they held back the heightened militancy of the working class. As a result of all this, in 1917 and particularly during 1918, two closely related, but contradictory tendencies were asserted in the Hungarian workers' movement. The growing anti-war sentiment and the influence of the Russian revolutions evoked a hitherto unprecedented upheaval. The number of organized workers lining up behind the MSzDP increased with extraordinary rapidity whom in the midst of Hungarian conditions the party rightfully regarded as its own militant force. The number of trade union members rose from 55,000 in 1916 to 217,000 by the end of 1917 to 300,000 by October 1918 and to 721,000 by the end of the year. The victory and peace-policy of the socialists in Russia also gave rise to greater confidence in the Hungarian social democrats. The opportunism of the party leadership was concealed for a long time from the masses. This was promoted by the frequently militant and radical expressions of the party leadership and by the several meetings organized to promote peace and obtain voting rights.

In the movement's practice clashes and conflicts had nevertheless become inevitable between the active worker masses longing for revolutionary action and the policy of the social democratic leaders. In 1917-1918 the growing forces of the Hungarian organized workers and the militant mass-character of their activities had demonstrated that the proletariat was ready to put into practice the most popular slogan of the day: "Let us, too, do like the Russians." This resulted in the second tendency: the spontaneous opposition of the proletariat to the compromising policy of the social democratic party. The proletariat became conscious of this process only very slowly and ideological enlightening work which made them conscious of it was still limited. At times, however, these differences rose to the surface, heralding the inevitability of an open struggle between the opportunist and revolutionary forces of the workers' movement.

In November 1917 there were demonstrations and meetings expressing sympathy with the Russian proletarian revolution and the Soviet peace proposals. In December and January 1918 movements emerged urging the formation of workers' councils. During 1918 there were hundreds of strikes and work stoppages. The iron-workers alone took part in six-to-seven-hundred wage actions. Between January and October 1918 there had been strikes of shorter or longer durations in practically every factory in Budapest (in the larger ones even on several occasions). The national political mass strikes in January and June were outstanding among them. The January strikes - taking place almost simultaneously with similar Austrian, Czechoslovakian and German strikes - expressed solidar-

² PI Archives, fond 658, bundle 1, Minutes of the extraordinary February 10, 1918 national meeting of the MSzDP. (MMTV, vol. 4/b, pp. 410-461.)

ity with the Russian proletarian power and opposition to the German peace dictate made at Brest-Litovsk and demanded a just peace. The June strikes started at the Machine Works of the Hungarian State Railways, one of the largest factories in the country, in answer to the gendarmes having killed several workers. However, politically it was already aimed against the entire system of war government. In the two revolutionary actions some 800,000 workers took part. In the fire of these struggles, the Hungarian organized workers became, by the fall of 1918, a decisive political factor in the history of the nation.

Until the proletariat reached this point, they were acting partly spontaneously, without the help of the social democratic leaders and partly against their will. The right-wing leaders of the party were conducting discussions with the war government and the capitalists, while the workers were striking and fighting. The social democratic leaders took the wind out of the sails of the general political mass strikes of 1918 which the proletarians initiated. In these movements the workers were led by the idea that "... rather than a general strike, this will be the Hungarian revolution..."³

However, the right-wing social democratic leaders made an effort to limit the revolutionary determination of the proletariat in conformity with their own ideas. The great strikes of 1918 had proved that the workers' will to act had long surpassed the limits set by the Social Democratic Party.

The party leaders in the October 8 manifesto⁴, issued during the revolutionary situation of autumn 1918, and in the official stand taken at the extraordinary party conference held on October 13,⁵ only stressed the need to solve the bourgeois democratic tasks, as the strategic current issue. In keeping with their opportunist attitude they sought to solve these in the interest of ensuring cooperation with their bourgeois partners, in full harmony with their views through reforms and with many inconsistencies at that. The programme of action outlined in the October 8 manifesto was the starting point of discussion at the Congress. This was complemented by the account given by Zsigmond Kunfi and the resolution proposed by the party leadership. The basic demand of the manifesto was an independent Hungary built "on the principle of full legal equality of individuals, classes and nationalities". For this end the manifesto demanded the immediate resignation of the government and the formation of a government which would include "the representatives of all the democratic classes and national minorities living in the country". The duty of this government would have been to dissolve parliament and to convoke a new one on the basis of universal, equal suffrage with secret ballot, and to conclude peace ("on the basis of the Russian proletarian revolution and Wilson's principles"), to ensure bourgeois democratic freedoms, to democratize the administration, to implement a drastic and fundamental agrarian reform giving the land to those who cultivate it, to build up a broad welfare and labour safety policy and to guarantee "for all national minorities in the coun-

³ PI Archives, fond 658, bundle 1. Short hand minutes of the extraordinary party conference of the MSzDP, held on February 10, 1918. (MMTV, vol. 5, p. 92.)

⁴ "Magyarország népéhez!" (To the People of Hungary!), *Népszava*, October 8, 1918.

⁵ PI Archives, fond 658, bundle 1, galley proofs of the papers of the party conference of the social democratic party on October 13, 1918. (MMTV, vol. 4/b, pp. 461-489.) The data and the various quotations relating to the conference were issued on the basis of this source.

try the right to the free and unrestricted use of their mother-tongue". This latter, narrow demand was supplemented in the further text of the manifesto and in the conference address of the leadership to include the right to self-determination and referred to a Hungary based on a free federation of nations.

In addition to these bourgeois democratic demands there were some which, depending on their interpretation and execution, may go beyond them. There is mention of socializing factories which had outgrown individual management, the transfer of the financial burdens of the war and the state to large properties and incomes. The manifesto also mentions a new constitution to be drawn up on the basis "of democratic and socialist principles".

The manifesto did not urge the overthrow of the war government and the establishment of revolutionary people's power. It was also silent about the form of state (although at the conference Kunfi rejected the bourgeois parties' idea of the continuation of "personal union") and about the formation of workers' and soldiers' councils. It touched on agrarian reform only in general terms and created doubts as to the concrete interpretation of the right to national self-determination.

The resolution of the party leadership put before the congress urged the approval and realization of essentially the above programme. They expected this programme to be implemented partly by the *political* and *economic* class struggle of the working class and partly through the renewal of the alliance – rejected at the February congress – with the opposition bourgeois parties. The party leadership made great efforts to have this last part of the resolution accepted by the congress, since this alliance was the political basis of the bourgeois democratic changes they suggested. In this spirit they rejected the ideas of the leading role of the working class and its party in the approaching transformation and denied the imminent perspective of a socialist transformation. On behalf of the party leadership, Kunfi spoke about the necessity of a socialist transformation in property relations but insisted that this cannot be achieved by an overnight change at the top but by a protracted class struggle lasting for years or decades. His main argument was the "weakness of the working class". According to him, Soviet power could only be realized in a country where the proletariat made up the majority of the population "or in such a country where the proletariat can assert minority rule by using the same means with which the present minority rules". Kunfi, therefore, in a certain sense equated the rule of the landowner-capitalist classes, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, with the dictatorship of the proletariat exercised in the interests of the people. As for the power of the workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils, he regarded them as minority rule. It was his opinion that the limits of the strength of the Hungarian working class constituted an obstacle to an independent proletarian policy. At the same time the party leadership showed even less interest during the war years than during the years prior to the war in a revolutionary alliance with the peasantry and the national minorities which could have ensured an independent socialist mass base.

On October 25, 1918, the leaders of the MSzDP, in conformity with their ideology, formed a National Council in conjunction with the left-wing bourgeois parties, the Independence Party and the Radical Party, in which they ceded leadership to the representatives of the bourgeois parties. The National Council naturally attempted to check rather than lead the popular movements, while try-

ing to give the appearance of leading them. The masses considered the National Council and with it the MSzDP as their leaders in their struggle.

In the second half of October 1918, tens and hundreds of thousands of workers took to the streets day after day. The disciplined and determined ranks of the workers participating in demonstrations and mass meetings contributed to the growing authority of the MSzDP but also of the National Council.

On October 30 and 31, 1918 while the left-wing bourgeois and social democrat leaders negotiated with the king, the government and the leaders of the right-wing parties a reformist solution without revolution and without the intervention of the masses – the proletariat, together with the revolutionary soldiers and peasants were already taking joint action on the streets of Budapest. An armed uprising, which had seemed avoidable to the leaders of the social democratic party and its allies broke out and led the revolution to victory. This has been recorded by Hungarian history as the bourgeois democratic revolution of October 1918.

At the moment of victory the working class was the only organized force in the country. The way the balance of power shaped up should have enabled the working class to ensure decisive part of political power for itself, to carry through with the bourgeois democratic transformation and thereby pave the way for a socialist revolution. The working class could not avail itself of this objective historical opportunity because it lacked a revolutionary party. Not even then did the leaders of the MSzDP pursue an independent class policy, and they rejected the hegemony of the proletariat. They participated in the new government but ceded to the bourgeois parties the larger share of power. The government headed by Mihály Károlyi (the majority of the portfolios went to the more or less progressive minded politicians of the Independence Party, besides Oszkár Jászi of the Radical Party, two social democrats – Ernő Garami and Zsigmond Kunfi – were given ministerial posts) as far as its composition and programme were concerned was more radical than any preceding government. However, it no longer reflected realistically the balance of power of the revolution, nor the gains made by the proletariat and the historical tasks ahead. The social democratic leaders in the coalition committed themselves to a policy of transformation which – at the beginning – would have tolerated even the rule of the Habsburg crown (in the form of a personal union). The masses were disarmed and urged to preserve order and to temporarily suspend class struggle. They tried also to restrict the authority of the newly established power organs of the people (workers' and soldiers' councils) and they prevented the consistent, revolutionary execution of bourgeois democratic tasks. They tried to confine social changes within the bounds of bourgeois democracy by joint action with the bourgeois parties, even making use of the organized armed force of the proletariat. The working masses, expecting and demanding that the revolution be continued along socialist lines were made to believe that they had achieved "full victory" and that further advances would be obtained with the aid of their voting rights. They tried to dissuade the workers from their intention to go on by frightening them with the bloodshed that may result from such efforts.

This role of the social democratic party was neither an accidental, nor an isolated phenomenon. It was the logical consequence of the reformism prevailing in the majority of the social democratic parties and of the views emanating from the impotence of the centrist forces. The parties continued the policy which had failed

utterly in 1914, and in 1918 culminated in the further bankruptcy of a number of social democratic parties, including that of Hungary. This failure was manifested by their refusal to seize power under proletarian leadership and their use of organized labour to defend the bourgeois system – in a historical situation especially propitious for the working class. This finally made it historically necessary to form a new workers' party with a revolutionary theory in Hungary. A number of other countries were then faced with a similar task. In October 1918, speaking of the European revolutionary movements, Lenin stressed: "Europe's greatest misfortune and danger is that it has *no* revolutionary party ... Of course, the mighty revolutionary movement of the masses may rectify this but it is nevertheless a serious misfortune and a grave danger." At this point Lenin remarked that it is important to support "the revolutionary groups of genuinely internationalist workers who are to be found in all countries. The proletariat will very soon turn away from the traitors and renegades and will follow these groups, drawing and training leaders from their midst".⁶

The Revolutionary Trends in the Hungarian Workers' Movement in 1917–1918

In the course of the Hungarian workers' actions and anti-war struggles of 1917–1918 the activation of the old oppositionist forces of the MSzDP and the emergence of such new forces produced a new revolutionary leading cadre.

The representatives of the emerging Hungarian opposition belonged to two revolutionary trends: the left-wing social democrat and the revolutionary socialist (antimilitarist-syndicalist). Within these arose other smaller or larger groups which mutually affected each other.

The Left-Wing Social Democrats

This term includes all the left-wing opposition shop stewards active in the trade unions and to a lesser degree in the party organizations as well as the old and new oppositionists in the social democratic party.

The immediate leaders of the revolutionary industrial workers were the trade-union shop stewards in the factories. These opposition shop stewards came mainly from among the workers of large factories and armament works (Ede Chlepkó, Rezső Fiedler – iron turners, Rudolf Jakab and Sándor Oszterreicher – iron workers, Ferenc Bajáki – locksmith, Miklós Cservenka – iron turner, József Mikulík – iron worker, Imre Csiki – locksmith, Béla Matusán – smith, Rezső Szaton – iron turner and others).

The opposition shop stewards were mostly young left-wing social democratic workers who rose to prominence in the workers' movements because of their inherent intelligence, organizing and agitational abilities, courage and the confidence of their comrades in them, who, besides, were highly skilled workers indispensable to war production. They did not form any independent opposition

⁶ Lenin, V.I.: *Collected Works*, vol. 28, p. 113, Progress Publishing House, Moscow, 1965.

organizations. Opposed to the right-wing leaders, they searched for and often made contact with the left-wing social democratic opposition leaders and with the revolutionary socialists.

In the period under review the workers, led by the opposition shop stewards carried out a whole series of independent economic and political actions. Especially from November 1917 onward the number of "unofficial" wage-struggles and strikes rose by leaps and bounds. The left-wing shop stewards participated in initiating movements demanding the setting-up of workers' councils. Many of them were present at the conference on January 13, 1918, which aimed at forming the workers' council of Budapest. The connections and militancy of the left-wing shop stewards were instrumental to the rapid spread of the general political mass strike on January 18, 1918. After the strike was broken, the authorities began to harass the left-wing shop stewards. In some cases the party and trade-union leadership itself resorted to expulsions. However, this could not prevent the oppositionist stewards from rallying the workers once again in a number of small strikes, in the great March strike of the iron-turners and especially in the general political mass strike of June. In spite of official persecution, by the autumn of 1918 a large group of opposition shop stewards had developed, supported by a substantial number of workers and particularly it was the workers of the large factories who were ready for action.

The roots of the old social democratic opposition originated in the opposition movement of the 1900s led by Ervin Szabó and Gyula Alpári. Some of the participants in these movements (Béla Vágó, Béla Szántó, white collar workers, party and trade-union functionaries, Jenő László, lawyer and others) again became active from the autumn of 1916 under the impulsion of the growing antimilitarist spirit of the workers. At regular meetings they discussed and condemned the party and trade-union leaderships' initially openly social-chauvinistic and then opportunistic policy of supporting the war. The activity of the opposition was based on previous militant and antimilitarist views which were enhanced during the war years by the views and slogans of the revolutionary trends emerging in the international workers' movement (the Zimmerwaldians, the German independents, the Spartacists and, from 1917, the Bolsheviks) which reached them. Availing themselves of friendly circles formed by factory workers, shop stewards and trade-union activists around them, they criticized the policy of the party leadership and urged the workers to pursue a policy of consistent, courageous, anti-militarist class struggle.

The legal and illegal activities of the old left-wing opposition members gained momentum particularly after November 1917. They initiated and guided the debates between the representatives of the revolutionary workers' movement and the social democratic leaders. At first the discussion concerned the methods to be applied in the fight for peace and against the war government, but subsequently it unavoidably included the aims of this struggle and the forces that could be drawn into it. Late in 1917 the mass meetings and demonstrations reverberated with the class conscious demand that the Russian example be followed (joined by a condemnation of the opportunist policy of the party leadership). The slogans called for peace, support of the Russian revolution and the formation of workers' councils. A resolution adapted at the general meeting of the free organization of the Hungarian Federation of Clerks and Commercial Employees at Christmas 1917

also reflected the views of the left-wing opposition which urged "a socialist policy truly reflecting the spirit of the class struggle and utilizing all possible means at its disposal" on the party leadership and that it make use of the revolutionary determination of the masses for changing the social system.⁷

Similar demands had been raised by the representatives of the opposition at four large workers' meeting on January 13, 1918. The resolution which was adopted (just as the previous one) criticized the activity of the social democratic leadership, who timidly cited their "realistic policy" and lost sight of the independent, further tasks of the working class and the need to prepare for them. This resolution furthermore also stated that the party leadership was unqualified to lead the class struggle of the proletariat. It demanded the establishment of a Budapest Workers' Council through which the working class could exercise direct control over the policy of the party and the party leadership.⁸

The authors of the resolution, Béla Vágó, Béla Szántó, Gyula Hevesi and indirectly, through his influence, Ervin Szabó were members of the old left-wing opposition and the anti-militarist groups. The resolution itself was a mixture of the influence of syndicalism and also of a partial surmounting of it. The demand for the establishment of workers' and the regard for the seizure of political power by the Russian Workers' soviets through force of arms as an example marked a new road, reflecting the influence of the Bolshevik October.

The members of the old opposition played an important role in starting the political mass strikes of January 1918 and nurturing the revolutionary mood. They called together a meeting of the oppositionist, the shop stewards of the larger factories in the evening of January 20, 1918 and decided to continue the strike, in defiance of the social democratic party leadership's resolution to call it off. In reprisal, the party leadership attacked the opposition and its centre, the Federation of Clerks, as "subversives". The opposition was forced partially to retreat. However, its leaders continued to meet regularly with each other and with the opposition shop stewards as well.

At that time Gyula Alpári did not yet participate in the work of the old opposition. But from the autumn of 1917 in his articles published in the *Neues Politisches Volksblatt*, a German paper published in Budapest, he advocated the news of the Zimmerwaldians on peace without annexation and indemnity, based on the right of self-determination. He declared his support for the Russian proletarian revolution and its peace efforts. He expressed conviction that Lenin's program will lead the Russian workers, soldiers and peasants to victory and the effect of this victory will not stop at the borders of Russia. He awaited this influence with manifest understanding, "... the light now comes from there - from Russia. We warmly welcome the light beamed at us from the East," he wrote in the November 24, 1917 issue of the paper.⁹

The old social democratic opposition was an ideologically well equipped group rich in the experiences of the Hungarian revolutionary movement. From the out-

⁷ "A magánalkalmazottak kongresszusa" (The Congress of the Employees of Private Enterprises), *Népszava*, December 27, 1917.

⁸ "A munkásság és a háború" (The Working Class and the War), *Népszava*, January 15, 1918.

⁹ Alpári, Gy.: "Keletről jön a fény" (The Light Comes from the East). (MMTVD, vol. 5, pp. 19-20.)

set its activity advanced and accelerated the growth of the revolutionary forces and the rapprochement of the opposition groups.

As a result of the anti-war struggle of the workers and under the influence of the Russian revolution, a slow process of differentiation set in from 1917 among the active social democratic leaders too. Some well-known functionaries of the party - Jenő Landler, Jenő Hamburger, György Nyisztor, Ernő Czóbel, Béla and Lipót Katz of Nagyvárad, Gyula Hajdu of Pécs, Ernő Bettelheim (Bólyai) of Sátorajauhely and others - volunteered to lead the anti-militarist struggle of the workers. These men became known in historical literature as the members of the new social democratic opposition. Although they never formed an independent group or organization, their left-wing views, forthright behaviour and deeds justify their being mentioned together. The members of the new opposition as early as at the November 25, 1917 extraordinary conference voiced the desire of the proletariat: to attain peace in the way the Russians did and form workers' councils to lead the struggle. Some of the delegates sharply criticized the party leaderships' passive policy and disavowal of responsibility. The opinion was also expressed that the attention of the party leadership be directed towards Petersburg, "the school of action", from which they can learn.¹⁰

The general mass strike of January accelerated the confrontation between the revolutionary forces and the party leadership. At the February 10, 1918 extraordinary congress the delegates - above all those of the new left-wing opposition - expressed the indignation of the working class at the fact that the party leadership "against the wish and will of the masses checked and stopped" the strike. Quoting the words of Lipót Katz, they protested against "the revolution being crushed by declaring that it is impossible." These delegates spoke openly of revolution for which the working class had to prepare. They demanded the alignment of all the necessary forces to wage a successful struggle. The spokesman of the agrarian workers, György Nyisztor and others urged the still unorganized masses of workers, the village people and the oppressed national minorities to join the struggle so that "the Hungarian social democratic movement should at last break out in this country".¹¹

On that basis, the new left-wing opposition could be called the congressional opposition if some of its representatives had not gone beyond that; in a number of instances they openly undertook to guide the activity of the working class. Thus, for example, Landler and Hamburger led the January strike movement of railway-man in 1918. At the time of the June general political strike, it was particularly the audacity of Jenő Landler which contributed to the rapid and general spreading of the strike.

The members of the new opposition did not seek contact with other opposition groups. They hoped to shift party policy to the left within the framework of the MSzDP. Their presence and activity within the MSzDP created a peculiar situation: on the one hand, it temporarily strengthened the adherence of the working class to the party, while objectively preparing the orientation of the proletariat

¹⁰ "A munkások napja" (The Day of the Workers), *Népszava*, November 27, 1917. Also OL, ME XVI, res. 1917-7990. From the minutes of the extraordinary conference.

¹¹ PI Archives, fond 658, bundle 1. Minutes of the extraordinary national conference of the MSzDP, February 10, 1918.

toward the communist party which was to emerge later with a revolutionary programme. The activity of the new opposition marked the beginning, within the leading groups of the MSzDP, of such a new leading left-wing circle, which in 1919, during and after the Hungarian Republic of Councils was able to advance together with the revolutionary proletariat in breaking with the social democrats and becoming communists. Additionally, there were Dezső Bokányi, Sándor Latinca, Gyula Lengyel, József Pogány, Jenő Varga, the leaders and commissars of the Hungarian Republic of Councils, demonstrating the significance of this group in the history of the Hungarian workers' and communist movement.

The Revolutionary Socialists

The petty-bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, who depended on their salaries for a livelihood were hard hit by the war losses, growing inflation and the food and clothing shortages. Dissatisfaction and a desire for peace was also increasing among them. They began to display an interest in the anti-war and workers' movements which even extended to their active participation. This was particularly striking in the sudden growth in the membership of the private office employees trade union (from fourteen hundred to some fourteen thousand in 1917) and in new trade unions for the intelligentsia.

During 1917, under the impact of the anti-war sentiment, the Russian revolutions and the intensifying Hungarian workers' movement, anti-militarist groups were formed, composed mainly of young intellectuals with socialist leanings. These groups functioned illegally outside the MSzDP although occasionally they also availed themselves of legal opportunities for organizing.

The first group of anti-militarists began to take shape in the first half of 1917 and by the autumn they were organized. Its members either belonged to the Galilei Circle, and organization of left-wing socialist university students who were interested in radical ideas or were other young intellectuals. (Ilona Duczynska, Tivadar Sugár, Árpád Haász university students, Dr. Miklós Sisa, lawyer, chairman of the Galilei Circle, József Kelen, engineer, Mrs. Jolán Kelen (née Fried), school teacher, Imre Sallai, bank-clerk and others) all of whom had been raised on the most diverse bourgeois radical and socialist ideas. They had little contact with the working-class movement. However, they were united in that they held themselves to be anti-militarists, socialists and revolutionaries and were prepared to express their ideas in deeds as well.

The members of the group were under the influence of Ervin Szabó, the prominent theoretician of the early twentieth century left-wing social democratic opposition, who, from the autumn of 1917, became the real guiding spirit of some anti-militarist groups. By that time he had come to realize that democracy could be achieved only by the revolutionary activity of the working class, and that the fight waged by the working class for peace and democracy made possible and inevitable the struggle against imperialism and the whole capitalist system which was responsible for the war. This was the principled basis for the fact that despite his grave illness, he directly participated in political activity.

In October 1917 Ervin Szabó introduced the anti-militarist youth to the continuers of the pre-war syndicalist movement, the leaders of the small but revolutionary-minded syndicalist workers like Ignác Bellér, boiler-maker, Antal

Mosolygó, painter, Dezső Végh, decorator and others. This helped to bring the anti-militarists closer to the masses of workers: the syndicalists worked in various factories, they knew many factory workers and shop-stewards. From then on, the two groups carried on joint activities. They prepared leaflets, organized minor strikes and demonstrations, took part in the December 1917 and January 1918 movements demanding the formation of workers' councils. In the leaflets they published from the end of October 1917 they urged the workers and soldiers to fight against the war. They warned that the policy of the social democrats of asking for peace from the imperialist governments only gave rise to false illusions, but could lead to no results. As yet they only spoke in general terms about following the Russian example. They called for the intensifying of economic struggle, for general strikes, sabotaging of armaments production and for refusal of military services and subscription to war-loans as concrete tasks of the class struggle. Late in November 1917, the group made contact with Justus Vladimir, a Bolshevik worker, who had emigrated to Budapest in 1912, and through him, with the revolutionary group of Russian prisoners of war working in Budapest factories. With their help they obtained a mimeograph machine and produced leaflets titled "Our Brothers in the Army!"¹² which were distributed in barracks and at the front. The MSzDP kept clear of the agitation among the soldiers. The leaflet cited the Russian soldiers as an example, to show the necessity of cooperation between the workers and soldiers for attaining peace and land, and against the "parasitic gang of landed counts and industrial barons". The words of this small group met with a strong reaction and the war government took counter-measures against it. On and following January 14, 1918 the police arrested most members of the group.

In 1917, there developed around the leadership of the newly organized National Federation of Industrial and Transport Clerks (a branch of the clerks' trade union) an anti-militarist group consisting chiefly of engineers and factory clerks such as Armin Helfgott, Gyula Hevesi, László Sajó, Pál Zádor and others. Many of them were members of the organizing committee thus having had legal and comparatively wide opportunities to organize the group's anti-militarist activity since the trade union encompassed the engineers, technical clerks and technicians of factories in Budapest and the provinces. This group – according to the memoirs of Gyula Hevesi – came to be known as the Inter-Plant Organizing Committee or the Inter-Plant Committee.

The members of the engineers' group were convinced that capitalist production had outlived itself. It also condemned the bloodshed of the war and the compromising policy of the MSzDP. Their views were characterized by an underestimation of the political struggle and by their stressing a special, simplified form of economic struggle: they believed that sabotage by the engineers and inventors could put an end to the war and bring about the collapse of the capitalist system. The members of the group, under the indirect influence of members of the old social democratic opposition and particularly of Béla Vágó and Ervin Szabó, came closer to socialist views. They became enthusiastic supporters of the Russian revolution, of the idea of workers' soviets and of the struggle against war waged together with the organized workers. Their main achievement was the part they had

¹² PI Archives, pamphlet and leaflet collection, I. 90/1918/828. (MMTVD, vol. 5, p. 47.)

in organizing the anti-war demonstration and strikes at the end of December and early January.

As a result of the groups' activity there was created among the technical intelligentsia a notable anti-war base close to the workers' movement and to the idea of a socialist transformation of society. Later this was of tremendous importance to the economic activity of the Hungarian Republic of Councils.

A group of young anti-militarist writers and artists gathered in 1917 around the literature and arts magazine *Ma*, edited by the proletarian writer, Lajos Kassák. Among its collaborators were Aladár Komját, Sándor Barta, József Lengyel, József Révai, János Mácsa, János Lécai, Imre Sallai, Ervin Sinkó, László F. Boros, Béla Uitz and many others. These young people held socialist and anarcho-syndicalist views, sharply condemned the war, sympathized with the workers' movements and the Russian revolution and looked forward to radical deeds. Their activity was manifested particularly in anti-war literary and artistic creations and in a search for "revolutionary" forms of expression. The magazine gave space to articles of sharp social criticism, praising the Russian revolution and ridiculing the opportunism of the social democrats. Due to conceptual and personal reasons there were constant changes in the group of editors and writers. Most of them chose the revolutionary struggle for socialism and, exceeding the boundaries of literature and art, they joined the illegal agitational and organizational activity of the revolutionary socialists.

The Galileists, syndicalist workers, members of the Inter-Plant Committee, revolutionary writers and artists, were the "first set" of the anti-militarists, to be dispersed by police persecution in January 1918. In a matter of days, a "second set" replaced them under the leadership of Ottó Korvin, a young bank clerk. Korvin had not previously taken part in the movement, but under the influence of his brother, József Kelen, the left-wing of the Galilei circle and Ervin Szabó (to whom Korvin in his prison-diary of autumn 1919 referred as his master) professed anti-militarist and socialist views. During the January 1918 arrests, Korvin took over the contacts of the anti-militarist student-groups and their duplicating machine as well. He set out with enormous will, energy, and excellent organizational ability to continue where they had left off.

In addition to Korvin, the organizing activity of Imre Sallai and Antal Mosolygó rose to prominence. József Lengyel, Aladár Komját, József Révai, János Lécai, Erzsébet Sipos and others, mostly intellectuals and clerks, also participated actively in the work, having previously taken part in various anti-militarist groups. The "second set" was more stable than the first, strictly followed the roles of conspiracy and maintained contact with the factory workers of Budapest and its vicinity. Ervin Szabó continued to help in forming the group's policy and in drafting the leaflets.

A few days after the strike of January 1918, another leaflet appeared which ruthlessly exposed the social democratic leaders: "For three days those who call themselves your leaders have played a game with you. After three days of chatter they called of the strike which took place independently of them" – the leaflet stated, signed by "The Revolutionary Socialists of Hungary".¹³

¹³ PI Archives, pamphlet and leaflet collection, I. 9/1918/662. (MMTVD, vol. 5, pp.73–74.)

Leaflets published later carried the same signature. This gave rise to the name "revolutionary socialists".

In the following months no important event occurred without having the revolutionary socialists react by distributing leaflets. The leaflets disclosed the failure of the fight for suffrage. Pointing to the example of the Russian workers, peasants and soldiers, they called upon the working class of Hungary to fight against the war, to form workers' councils, to revolt and overthrow the power of the ruling classes. They explained that social democracy had lost its revolutionary character and that the leaders of the party were in fact "nothing more than bourgeois democrats". The leaflets of the revolutionary socialists counterposed the aims of the proletarian revolution and the socialist state with the reformist policy of the social democratic party. Speaking of the approaching proletarian revolution throughout Europe, they called upon the Hungarian workers to be prepared: "The struggle is near ... much nearer than your cowardly leaders would have you believe".¹⁴

Examining the appeals of the revolutionary socialists calling for a direct proletarian revolution, the objection arises as to whether it was an untimely, precipitate slogan at a period when the making of peace and the solving of the bourgeois democratic tasks were in the forefront. In this connection it was untimely. But in another connexion, it was not, since the possibility of an approaching socialist revolution, the proximity of the two revolutions and the recognition of the ensuing tasks were on the order of the day. The idea of revolution had to be propagated and the working class had to be prepared for the revolution – in the interest of the entire imminent revolutionary transformation. The very fact that this work and process was begun by one section of the movement with the slogan of immediate proletarian revolution was an inevitable reaction to the opportunist policy of the social democrats.

The activity of revolutionary socialists continued to bear the stamp of anarcho-syndicalism. The appeals were not backed by an organization capable of leading the masses. The members of the group, though justified in their condemnation of the opportunist MSzDP, did not understand that neither the envisaged workers' council, nor the enthusiastic but always small group of revolutionary socialists could substitute for the revolutionary party of the working class.

The leaflets of the revolutionary socialists reached the factories, barracks and even the front. For months, the authorities had carried on an energetic search but only in May 1918 did the police arrest some members of the "second set", Mosolygó, Sallai and others. Korvin avoided arrest but lost contact and for a time the activity of the group ceased.

Special mention has to be made of Ervin Szabó. Although he was the real ideological leader of the revolutionary socialists, he did not patronize them and in certain questions he did not identify himself with the simplified slogans of the leaflets. So in contrast with the views of the revolutionary socialists calling for immediate proletarian revolution, the writings of Ervin Szabó during those days presented a more distinguishable picture. He regarded bourgeois democracy as an inevitable stage of social development, but he condemned the tactics of the

¹⁴ PI Archives, pamphlet and leaflet collection, I. 9/1918/662, 664, 665, 668. (MMTVD, vol. 5, pp.73–74, 90–91, 137–138 and 171–172.)

MSzDP which proclaimed suffrage as the panacea for all the evils of society. He disapproved of the working class starting the struggle with bourgeois democracy as its sole perspective. He deemed it necessary that the proletariat always bear in mind in its activity that democracy is only a transitional aim on the road to socialism and should constantly be concerned with "all the weapons, opportunities and final aims of class struggle".

It is obvious from the fact that the leaflets of the revolutionary socialists were formulated on the advice of Ervin Szabó that in 1918 it was not only for reasons of principle that he regarded it essential to keep the "final aim" on the agenda, but that he himself had thought a socialist revolution to be imminent.

The writings of Ervin Szabó in 1918, his activity in 1917–1918, his influence on the Hungarian revolutionary representatives of socialism (most of whom soon joined the ranks of the KMP) all prove that – in contrast to earlier views – Ervin Szabó's role was a fundamentally positive one in the process which led towards the formation of the communist party. This is also corroborated by an obituary which appeared in the October 16, 1918 issue of the central paper of the Hungarian communist prisoners of war, *Szociális Forradalom* (written most probably by Béla Kun), which read: "Ever since the Russian revolution every socialist saw in Ervin Szabó the spiritual leader, soul and organizer of the approaching decisive struggle of the workers. We Hungarian communists, too, in the course of and after the victory of the Russian proletariat's struggle and the confirmation of revolutionary Marxist tactics were strengthened in our conviction that Ervin Szabó was our man, our leader..."

The death of Ervin Szabó on September 30, 1918 was a great loss for all trends which deemed a revolutionary transformation possible and inevitable to change Hungarian conditions. His funeral – on October 2, 1918 – was a demonstration of all the forces, particularly of the working class which shortly afterwards started the struggle for the social transformation of the country.

The Socialist Opposition in the Bourgeois Democratic Revolution of October 1918

The revolutionary crisis emerging in the autumn of 1918 unfolded with renewed strength, enriching with new features the work of the social democrats and anti-militarists. The opposition began to define more decisively its ideas about how to proceed. One of its stages was the extraordinary congress of the MSzDP held on October 13, 1918. This was the conference of the chiefs of staff of an army – the working class – setting out or drifting into war. The left-wing delegates minutely examined the strategy and tactics of the party. In connection with the party leadership's proposal of cooperation with the bourgeois parties, the role of the working class, the allies, the aims to be achieved and the problems of orientation in foreign affairs were put on the agenda.¹⁵

¹⁵ PI Archives, fond 658, bundle 1, galley-proof of the material of the October 13, 1918 extraordinary conference of the MSzDP. For the addresses by the delegates, see MMTVD, vol. 4/b, pp. 475–489.

At the congress there was a basic difference on two questions between the party leadership and the majority of the delegates taking part in the discussion. In alliance with the bourgeois parties was challenged by the national minority delegates because of their fear for their national rights, while the majority of the Hungarians were concerned with the class base, because of their fear for an independent socialist policy. The latter was connected with the second problem: the different interpretations of the action programme summed up in the manifesto of October and the draft resolution of the party leadership. The documents were interpreted – contrary to the party leadership – by one part of the delegates as embodying not only the initial programme of the bourgeois democratic but also of the socialist transformation and wanted to develop it further in that direction.

The left-wing delegates speaking in the discussion (particularly Jenő Landler and József Pogány) obviously thought that "we are really faced by a revolutionary situation," in which the leading role of the proletariat could and had to be ensured as the consistent representative of its independent class interests in the pending social transformation. Their opinion reflected confidence in the working class and the Hungarian revolutionary forces. Accordingly, the left-wing delegates spoke about the overthrow of the monarchy and the war government, about the formation of a republic and a workers' militia and about the immediate establishment of workers' councils as the organizational foundation of an independent proletarian policy. The repeated demand that "We must strive for the working class to obtain power" was indicative of the desire to go beyond the aims of the party leadership.

The proposal of Pál Zádor (president of the Hungarian Federation of Industrial and Transport Clerks) deserves special mention, since it contained the first comprehensive action programme of the Hungarian left-wing socialists. This proposal was supported by a number of delegates, among them by Nyisztor. The proposal accepted the action programme of the party leadership as a starting point, but wanted to complement it in such a way that there be no ambiguity about the leading role of the proletariat. It defined more consistently the bourgeois democratic tasks, reinforcing the socialist content of the demands. The proposal was aimed at propagating "the ideology of revolution" and firmly noted that the condition was given "for the organized industrial and agrarian workers of Hungary to have a decisive voice in all measures pertaining to the future of the country." It stressed that the impending struggle had to be waged "independently, according to the socialist principles of the class struggle." Independently, but not alone. Those who made the proposal counted above all on the alliance of the peasantry. Quoting the words of Nyisztor, the Hungarian peasant – similar to the Russian – has always been considered a "revolution-maker". In addition – contrary to the opinion of other left-wingers – they considered democratic parties of the bourgeoisie acceptable as comrades-in-arms providing it did not do any harm to "the future of the industrial and agrarian workers." In order to avoid this, they recapitulated the demands which, if immediately granted, could serve as guarantees. Thus they demanded that peace be immediately made. Their demand for the liquidation of feudal remnants from the political, economic and social life went beyond the proposals of the party leadership and were more concrete. Among other things they demanded that every man and woman over twenty years of age have the vote. They also demanded the abolition of the parliament's upper house and the reorganization of the administration in such a manner that the organiza-

tions and committees of the "industrial and agrarian workers and citizens" have direct control over it. As for the land question the opposition proposal took a direct stand for a drastic distribution of land which would ensure the participation of the peasantry on the side of revolution. It demanded the confiscation of church and entailed property and gradually of all estates which could not be cultivated by the owner and his family. Furthermore, the socialist solution of the agrarian question was not rejected; it accepted the need to promote the formation of agricultural producer-cooperatives.

This opposition proposal included among the tasks of a future revolutionary government some, which were directed against the positions of capital. Among these the most important were the socialization of industrial plants, the nationalization of banks and credit institutions and the participation of workers and employees in the control of production.

Those who made the proposal did not yet aim at the establishment of a republic of councils. They simply drafted the outline of an eventual workers' – peasants' democratic power which would result from the bourgeois democratic revolution led by the proletariat and which would prepare for the socialist revolution.

This congress was an important arena for the clash and delineation of reformist and revolutionary views. Although the party leadership succeeded in pushing through its own resolution, with slight modifications, the left-wing proposals nevertheless contributed in such a way as to ensure that the movement of the masses towards revolution should not be entirely accidental.

In the autumn of 1918 the opposition groups active outside the party drew closer to each other as a result of the revolutionary situation. The movement was given a new feature and new impetus by the closer cooperation between the leaders of the old social democratic opposition – Béla Vágó, Jenő László, Béla Szántó – and the leader of the "revolutionary socialists", Ottó Korvin and the factory shop stewards.

Some of the "revolutionary socialists" led by Ottó Korvin tried to sharpen the anti-war atmosphere by organizing "direct actions," assassination attempts. Most significant among them was an unsuccessful attempt on the life of István Tisza, the leading figure of the war policy, by János Léka on the 16th of October. These activities – the use of individual terror – bore witness to the bravery of the revolutionary socialists, as well as to their ideological and organizational backwardness.

The members of the old opposition concentrated their efforts on building up their mass connections (Ottó Korvin and some other revolutionary socialists, too, were asked to take part in this work) so as to prepare the workers for revolution and for a radical change in the system. They not only wanted to achieve bourgeois democratic freedoms but also to prepare for a socialist republic. This is evident from a letter sent by Dezső Somló on October 25, 1918 to Ernő Garami, the editor of *Népszava*, in which he warned the party leadership that the excesses of reaction and the world war made the situation ripe not only for the triumph of civil liberties but also for the early realization of socialist ideas. Take note of our presence, we want a socialist republic as soon as possible!"¹⁶

¹⁶ PI Archives, fond 659, 1918/1.

The socialist opposition had, through the factory shop stewards, a considerable force at its command by the end of October 1918. On October 27, at a meeting with the representatives of the factories, it was decided to prepare for an armed uprising. The resolution and later its realization meant the recognition and application of the armed uprising as one of the important weapons of the working class in the Hungarian workers' movement.

A part of the preparations was the agreement between the opposition groups with the leaders of the Soldiers' Council which was formed on October 25. With the help of the Soldiers' Council, independent of the MSzDP, it became possible to coordinate the revolutionary actions of the workers and the soldiers. The arming of the workers, which had been going on for weeks was sped up during the following days. On October 29, the workers of the Armaments Factory broke open the depot and armed themselves. Documents record the arming of workers of the Csepel, Kispest, Albertfalva and Ganz-Fiat factories, too. The influence of the Soldiers' Council grew from day to day among the military units stationed in Budapest.

The leaders of the opposition, the factory shop stewards and the Soldiers' Council agreed on the details of their concerted actions at their joint meeting on October 29 and 30, 1918. The uprising was set for November 4. However, the spontaneous revolutionary activity of the masses made it necessary at the late night joint meeting of October 30 to decide in favour of immediate action. The opposition unhesitatingly agreed to lead the spontaneous uprising. The socialist opposition led by Béla Szántó ensured, on the night of October 30, a degree of organization and guidance through the Soldiers' Council for the mass movement. "Military matters were in the hands of Lieutenant Béla Szántó, who for a time was the chief of the general staff of the revolution," wrote Lajos Magyar, member of the National Council.¹⁷ Jenő Landler had an outstanding rôle in guiding revolutionary events as the "bureau chief" of the National Council and he cooperated during the night with the socialist opposition functioning outside of the party, with the members of the Soldiers' Council and other revolutionaries.

Armed revolutionary units occupied the railway stations, the telephone centres, and the building of the garrison command. Military units in growing numbers joined the workers and soldiers in revolt. At dawn a leaflet was distributed in the name of the MSzDP, but without the knowledge of the party leadership, urging the workers to go out on strike on the morning of October 31, so as to ensure the superior strength of the revolutionary forces. The demonstration of the proletariat, which carried hundreds of thousands with it, crowned the triumph of the revolution. The news of victory roused the people of the provincial towns and villages and brought them to the side of the revolution.

Victory therefore was above all won by the workers, in cooperation with the soldiers, under the leadership of their revolutionary leaders. The proletariat was unable to satisfactorily influence the further course of events in their own interests because it lacked a theoretically equipped revolutionary party to lead them. The socialist opposition was unable to come forward as an independent political force. Political power therefore went automatically into the uncertain hands of the leaders of the revolution, the parties of the National Council.

¹⁷ Magyar, L.: *A magyar forradalom. Élmények a forradalom főhadiszállásán* (The Hungarian Revolution. Experiences at the Revolution's Headquarters), p. 9, Atheneum, Budapest, 1919.

The Socialist Opposition in the Days Following October 31, 1918

The victory of the bourgeois democratic revolution did away with the system of dualism, secured the independence of Hungary as a state, and ended the reactionary power of landowners and the big bourgeoisie. It brought into being a new bourgeois democratic government, ensured the extension of civil liberties, introduced important social welfare measures and held out the promise of further democratic and social reforms. All this created incomparably more favourable ground for the emergence of a revolutionary workers' movement. From the very outset, however, the belatedness of and circumstances under which the new power was born (leadership was not in the hands of the working class) resulted, together with the achievements, in blocking the socialist tomorrow which was already on the threshold.

The loose unity of the socialist opposition fell apart as early as October 31. Since its members were not clear on the tasks the working class and they would have to solve after the success of the armed uprising, they were helpless from the very first minute and in many instances even helped the bourgeois social democratic government to restore "peace".

The members of the new left-wing opposition once again decided that only through the social democratic party could the revolution be carried on. The other left-wing socialist opposition groups rousing themselves from the initial intoxication of revolutionary victory turned ever more openly against the bourgeois-democratic government in power, against the words and deeds of those who swore allegiance to the king and declared themselves for "order". The demands that were raised already in the first days were a refutation of the illusion that "we have achieved all" which only served to consolidate the bourgeois system. The November issue of the trade-union paper, *Vegyipari Munkás*, carried an article "A forradalom útja" (The Path of Revolution), most probably written by the editor, Dezső Somló, which stated as the duty of the socialists the realization of democracy as proclaimed by the Bolsheviks and German Spartacists and not as by Wilson. It stated that the National Council and the democracy propagated by it was the first brave word in the hitherto stifling atmosphere of Hungary, which has to be followed by a second one, the council of Hungarian workers and soldiers.

The opposition organized workers' actions in an attempt to stimulate the MSZDP to pursue a socialist policy of class struggle. One of these was the demonstration on November 1 when the demonstrators demanded a republic, in fact a socialist republic, declaring that the working class did not regard the revolution as completed. This demonstration set off a countrywide republican movement which forced the government to rescind its vow to the king and put the proclamation of a republic on its agenda.

The periodical *Ma*, edited by Lajos Kassák, in a special issue entitled "Kiáltvány a kommunista köztársaságért!" (Manifesto for a Communist Republic!) also favoured further progress. This manifesto exposed the endeavours which, relying on the Entente powers and under the guise of a national democracy, sought to maintain bourgeois property relations in Hungary. László, F. Boross, a journalist, in a discussion article in the same paper criticized the social democratic attempt to silence the "workers who demanded more". The article demanded, in the name of the working class, a socialist republic, socialism, "in today's Marxist sense of the

word". An article published a few weeks later made it evident that what he meant was the dictatorship of the proletariat and Bolshevism.¹⁸

The theme of developing the revolution became the subject of declarations of the intellectuals too, who were drawing closer to the left-wing socialist view. György Lukács, in an article titled "A Köztársasági Propaganda" (The Propaganda of the Republic), which appeared in the November 10, 1918 issue of *Világ*, warned those who wanted to stop halfway that "the revolution had just started and was not over." It became obvious from an article written by Lukács in the second half of November that he was still uncertain about what road to follow. He had already recognized that the economic and social relations made the class rule of the proletariat possible, but setting out from an abstract idealistic concept of democracy he rejected Bolshevism on the moral ground that it was a new form of class oppression.¹⁹

By the time the article appeared, György Lukács had already abandoned this view and in December 1918 he joined the communist party. Deserving of mention is the November 12, 1918 letter written by Ernő Bresztovszky, the Swiss correspondent of *Népszava*, about the justification and closeness of a socialist revolution. In this question – he wrote – the social democratic party, true to its basic principles, has to avoid that extreme form of the proletarian dictatorship which the Russian proletariat was compelled to adopt. "The Hungarian party either does not see, or does not want to see that it is obliged now that the attempt has already been made to establish a socialist society which in fact is here, that it has to be given all support even at the price of risking the holy domestic order because its failure would lead to the burial of proletarian ideals for a long time to come." According to him the short-sighted policy of the Social Democratic Party was nothing "but an abortion of the half-born socialist society."²⁰

The events which followed immediately after the victory of the revolution proved that the social democratic leaders, who were taking part in and supporting the government, had done their utmost to curb the revolutionary forces. It was then that the leaders of the opposition groups came to realize that they had to firmly concentrate their forces in order to make further progress.

Some members of the left-wing opposition and some opposition shop stewards wanted to follow the example of the German Independent Socialists and form the "Independent Group of Hungarian Socialists". The 'independents' included Dezső Somló, Lajos Sikorszky, Dr. Rezső Rajczy railway clerks and Sándor Oszterreicher, who were active among the workers of Csepel, Pesterzsébet and Mátyásföld. The 'independents' issued a leaflet, which exposed the attempt of the bourgeois-social democratic government to present the established power as the power of the workers. The authors pointed out that the proletariat has to make use of the favourable conditions to ensure that the revolution stop exploitation, take capital and the means of production into public ownership and create "the state power of free proletarians", a socialist, communist republic, warning the

¹⁸ "A bolsevizmus" (Bolshevism), *Szabadgondolat*, pp. 247–249, December, 1918. Special number.

¹⁹ Lukács, Gy.: "A bolsevizmus, mint erkölcsi probléma" (Bolshevism as an Ethical Problem), *Szabadgondolat*, December 10, 1918.

²⁰ PI Archives, fond 694, box 11, file 3, pp. 1–3.

proletariat against the danger of half-way measures and against a renewed strengthening of the capitalist order.²¹

The "independents" circulated leaflets calling for a meeting on November 15 to discuss the establishment of the organization. However, there is no data as to whether the meeting ever took place.

A numerically and politically important section of the opposition – the majority of the old social democrats (Jenő László, Béla Szántó, Béla Vágó and the recently returned from the front János Hirossik, László Rudas and others), and the revolutionary socialists allied with them (Ottó Korvin and Antal Mosolygó, just out of prison, and Imre Sallai) and a large part of the left-wing shop stewards all believed that it was necessary to establish within the MSzDP a well-organized left-wing, which would embody the revolutionary working class and guide the party's policy onto the road of class struggle. No solution was reached at the discussions as to organization or programme. This group of the opposition propagated its class struggle-minded views at meetings organized by the MSzDP. They prepared the publication of some communist pamphlets published in Soviet Russia but in the Hungarian language. On November 16, the day when the republic was proclaimed, leaflets thrown from aircraft to the celebrating masses before Parliament gave news of the message sent by the Soviet Russian government to the peoples of the Monarchy which the Hungarian government had not made public. The central slogan of the leaflet summed up the view of the opposition group and the further aims of the revolution: "We want a socialist republic!"²² The slogan thus brought to hundreds of thousands was an open declaration of war against attempts to consolidate the bourgeois system and against the policy of the MSzDP and the National Council. (On November 20 *Népszava* published the telegramme of the Soviet government under the title "Radiotelegram from Russia", but again pledged itself to stop at bourgeois democratic reforms, to maintain its pro Entente stand, to oppose a socialist revolution and the alliance proposed by Soviet Russia.)

On November 17, 1918 the opposition leaders held a conference which was attended by some fifty people. In his speech László Rudas urged an organizational split away from the MSzDP. However, neither did he have a detailed, concrete plan for the programme and structure of the proposed organization. The majority of those present were reluctant to break away and spoke against it. Finally it was agreed that the opposition should remain within the party, as the "Ervin Szabó Circle" and fight against the reformist policy of the party leadership.

The Circle, however, was never formed. Ernő Seidler, a technical clerk, a Galileist before the war and a social democrat, who participated in the revolutionary movement of Hungarian prisoners of war in Russia, arrived at the conference. He had not long before returned from captivity and from the end of October had been in contact with the opposition. He announced that Béla Kun and some other communist prisoners of war had returned from Soviet Russia. The conference broke up. The leaders of the opposition had known Béla Kun from the pre-war workers' movement, they knew of his leading role in the communist movement of Hungarian prisoners of war in Russia and understood that this arrival signified a turning point in the life of the opposition.

²¹ "Minden Proletárhoz!" (To all Proletarians!) (MMTVD, vol. 5, pp. 310–311.)

²² PI Archives, pamphlet and leaflet collection, I. 9/1918/999. (MMTVD, vol. 5, p. 345.)

By the middle of November 1918 the struggle between the reformist and revolutionary trends of the Hungarian workers' movement had been widely extended. The majority of the Hungarian socialist left wing openly declared themselves against the social democratic formula, stating that instead of reforming the capitalist system it was possible and necessary to proceed immediately towards a socialist transformation. They demanded the assertion of working class hegemony and the formation of a workers' – peasants' (poor peasant, soldier) alliance.

The left-wing militants of the Hungarian workers' movement therefore – as against the official leaders of the MSzDP – decided to hitch their cart to the revolutionary engine, which had set out in Petersburg. However, the representatives of the Hungarian left wing had no uniform revolutionary theory and did not understand that preparation for socialist revolution required the rallying of the revolutionary forces and the formation of a new revolutionary workers' party. The experiences of the Hungarian movement's militants, returning from Soviet Russia as prisoners of war, accelerated the progress towards such a party.

The Emergence and Activity of the Hungarian Communist Group among Prisoners of War in Soviet Russia between 1917–1918

During the First World War some 500,000 Hungarian workers, peasants and intellectuals were prisoners of war in Russia. This mass of Hungarian soldiers who had been exploited and oppressed at home and who had suffered all the hardships of the front and of imprisonment, were witness to the struggle of the Russian proletariat and peasantry under Bolshevik leadership. The victory of the proletarian revolution, the winning of peace, and the power of the Soviets, the expropriation of land and the factories, the declaration that all working people prisoners of war were free citizens had profoundly impressed the Hungarian prisoners of war.

The first contact of the revolutionary cells with the Bolsheviks were established after February 1917. Small groups of Hungarian prisoners of war also participated in the armed uprising of October. Following soon after the successful uprising, the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet government supported the formation of legal multi-national, internationalist socialist organizations in all larger prisoners of war centres. These were led, besides other social democratic prisoners of war of other nationalities, by the active members of the pre-war Hungarian workers' movement Béla Kun, Dezső Forgács, Ferenc Jancsik, Frigyes Karikás, Sándor Kellner, Károly Ligeti, Gábor Mészáros, Ernő Pór, József Rabinovics, Endre Rudnyánszky, Ernő Seidler, Tibor Szamuely, Károly Vántus²³ and other revolutionary minded intellectuals (Artur Dukesz and Lajos Ember, Ferenc Münnich, Károly Reiner and others). These Hungarian social democrats and the intellectuals who had turned socialist in war prisons became, under the influence of the revolution, communists and members of the Bolshevik Party, ready to disseminate Bolshevik principles and experiences among the thousands of Hun-

²³ Among them Ferenc Jancsik took part in the workers' movement from 1901, Sándor Kellner from 1904, Béla Kun from 1903, Ernő Pór from 1905, József Rabinovics from 1901 and Károly Vántus from 1897 onwards.

garian prisoners of war and later among the millions of workers and peasants at home. With this aim in view they, at Béla Kun's initiative, established in Moscow on March 24, 1918 the Hungarian Group of the Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party, the first Hungarian communists' organization. From this it is evident that the Hungarian communist group – as for its members, work and aims – was not only an organic part of the Bolshevik Party but also of the Hungarian working-class movement; it was a continuation of the third revolutionary trend which developed in 1917–1918.

The young, thirty-two year old Béla Kun became the leader of the movement of Hungarian prisoners of war and the head of the Hungarian communist group. Kun had been the well-known leader of the social democratic organization in Kolozsvár before the First World War. This well-grounded revolutionary Marxist, experienced in working-class struggle, was among the first in the prisoner of war camp to recognize the universal validity of the main features of Leninist (Bolshevik) ideology. Early in 1917 he became a member of the Bolshevik Party. He was among the initiators and organizers of the multi-national revolutionary internationalist movement of prisoners of war, of the international military units, and he himself had taken up arms to defend Soviet power. He had direct contact with Lenin himself, who held him in high esteem.

The members of the Hungarian communist group considered it their duty to take part in the organization of the internationalist units in defence of the first proletarian power. They recognized that the whole international workers' movement also served the interests of Hungarian workers and peasants. One of the historically significant results of their activity was that already in 1918 many thousands and in the years of the civil war one hundred thousand Hungarian internationalists took part in the fight for Soviet power. Their fight on the side of October was not only considerable from a moral and political point of view but at certain stages of the civil war from a military as well, above all along the Volga, in the Urals, in Siberia and in Turkestan. The role of the some one hundred thousand Hungarian internationalists, who fought between 1917–1921 for the October Revolution, which launched world history on a new path, was one of the greatest achievements of the Hungarian people in the struggle for the general progress of mankind.

As a result of the organizational and educational work of the Hungarian Communist Group, Hungarian communist cells were formed within a few months in a number of cities (Astrakhan, Perm, Petersburg, Samara, Saratov, Simbirsk, Voronezh, Tsaricin, Kazan, Nizhni-Novgorod, Omsk, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk, Tashkent, Samarkand, etc.), and in internationalist military units. In the whole territory of Soviet Russia many thousands of Hungarian communists were involved in these groups.

In the same months German, Yugoslav, Czechoslovak, Rumanian and later French, Bulgarian, Anglo-American communist groups also began to function alongside the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party. The Central Federation of Foreign Groups was formed in May 1918 to coordinate their activities. The Hungarian communists, particularly Béla Kun, who was elected chairman, had been very active in organizing the Federation. This was an important step in the unification of the revolutionary forces of the international workers' movement. The national minority groups were the first communist organizations of their

countries and their federation was the first union of communists of various countries and this contributed towards the preparation of the Third, the Communist International. At the Eighth Congress of the Bolshevik Party, in the address of the Central Committee, Lenin also made mention of it.²⁴

On April 3, 1918 *Szociális Forradalom*, the central organ of the Hungarian Group, the first communist paper in Hungarian was published. The paper appeared twice a week in 15–20,000 copies. In addition, some eighteen other papers in Hungarian appeared in 1918 for shorter or longer periods in the cities of Soviet Russia which disseminated the ideas of the proletarian revolution. The group also published two series of pamphlets, entitled *Kommunista Könyvtár* (Communist Library) and *Forradalmi Írások* (Revolutionary Writings). First, some writings by Lenin were published, under the title "A harc útja" (The Path of Struggle) with an introduction by Béla Kun discussing Lenin's career and important role in the development of the ideas of Bolshevism. Soon after, the *Communist Manifesto* was published. Two articles by Bukharin, the secretary of the Bolshevik Party at that time were also published: "Osztályharcok és forradalmak Oroszországban" (Class Struggles and Revolutions in Russia) and "A kommunisták programja" (The Programme of the Communists). This was followed by some articles written by Hungarian communist leaders. Among the most outstanding ones was "Mit akarnak a kommunisták?" (What do the Communists Want?) by Béla Kun which was the first popular summary in the Hungarian language of the ideas of Bolshevism. In this pamphlet Béla Kun also outlined the tasks of the Hungarian workers' movement, so that essentially it was the first document indicating the programme of the Hungarian communist movement. The papers and pamphlets of the group were brought to Hungary by the prisoners of war returning from Russia in the spring and summer of 1918.

After the conclusion of the Brest-Litovsk peace in March 1918, the Hungarian prisoners of war began to return home in masses in an organized way. Extensive, well prepared propaganda was carried on amongst those going to return home. The example of the Bolsheviks – particularly with the help of the words and writings of the communist prisoners of war – who made peace and ensured progress, found fertile soil in the hearts and minds of hundreds of thousands of Hungarian prisoners of war. In October 1918 some three hundred thousand prisoners of war of different nationalities returned home and began to spread the experiences of the Russian proletarian revolution, hastening the developing revolutionary ferment, initiating, and in many cases even leading the revolutionary movements of soldiers and after October 1918 of the peasants.

The documents of the Hungarian group (particularly the writings of Béla Kun) show the extent of ideological development which the Hungarian communists had attained. The Hungarian socialist prisoners of war had the direct opportunity to familiarize themselves with the experiences of the Russian revolution, with the scientifically developed – and partially tested – teachings of the long years of Bolshevik theoretical struggles under Lenin's leadership about the new roads and instruments of the class struggle, and to make known their general features which had international validity. Relying on their experiences, they tried to give a comprehensive answer to the questions posed by Hungarian society. They explained

²⁴ Lenin, V.I.: *Collected Works*, vol. 29, p. 161, Progress Publishing House, Moscow, 1965.

that the Hungarian revolution maturing amidst the circumstances of imperialism, the World War, the victorious Russian proletarian revolution and a general European revolutionary upsurge could, under the leadership of the proletariat and its revolutionary party – and only thus – achieve the socialist revolution as the immediate task, overthrow the capitalist system and establish workers' power and the dictatorship of the proletariat. With this understanding the communist prisoners of war opened up new perspectives for the Hungarian working class.

The Hungarian communists, starting from the concept of an approaching world revolution, spoke of a proletarian revolution as an immediate task, at the same time underestimating the significance of bourgeois democratic tasks confronting Hungarian society. They failed to recognize that only by solving these tasks could they open the way towards the victory of socialism. Nor did they work out the role and activities of the working class and party in a bourgeois democratic tasks. This mistake was partly corrected by historical developments; when the communist prisoners of war returned home in the middle of November, the proletarian revolution was already an immediate strategic task. The underestimation of the unresolved bourgeois democratic tasks which should have been solved with the help of the proletarian revolution was the source of many theoretical and political errors in the period of the preparation for and the existence of the Hungarian Republic of Councils and even in the subsequent history of the Hungarian communist movement.

The leaders of the group knew and stated that only the working class could lead the approaching revolution. They, however, clearly saw that the proletariat could not win the revolution by itself. They considered the peasantry, particularly the poor peasantry, as the ally of the working class. They understood that one of the pre-conditions of the alliance was the proletariat demanding the expropriation of the landowners' estates. Therefore they demanded the revolutionary seizure of all large estates without any compensation. However, the leaders of the group still had not grasped the fact that the centuries-old land hunger of the Hungarian peasantry made the distribution of land indispensable and that this was the main pre-condition for a firm worker-peasant alliance at this stage of the revolution, thus they instead proposed the immediate communal cultivation of the expropriated land. This incorrect standpoint conformed with the orthodox views on the agrarian question which prevailed at that time in the whole international workers' movement. Lacking practical experience, there were still only few who understood that a transition in agriculture to socialist, collective production in many countries could only be the result of a lengthy process, in which the first step was the distribution of a considerable portion of the land among the peasants. The more general validity of this practice of the 1917 October Revolution was only later recognized by the international and also by the Hungarian communist movement on the basis of the – often negative – new experiences of Russia, the Ukraine and last but not least, of Hungary in 1919.

The Hungarian Communist Group strongly condemned national privileges and all systems of national oppression. This also applied of the prevailing national minorities policy of the Monarchy and Hungary and from November 1918 onwards to the bourgeois-social-democratic endeavours for maintaining the territorial integrity of Hungary. They expected the national question to be finally solved by the rapid spread of world revolution and the fraternal alliance of the

Republic of Councils, when these questions would be settled on the basis of the workers' and poor peasants' right of self-determination in the spirit of the international solidarity of the peoples. The groups' standpoint still deviated from the realistic Leninist principle of the right of nations to self-determination. However, it was more progressive than any other Hungarian (or neighbouring country's) bourgeois and social democratic view; it served as a basis of cooperation with other communist groups holding similar opinions.

In the field of foreign affairs the Hungarian Communist Group condemned the German orientation which led the country into catastrophe but it also opposed the illusionary policy regarding the victorious group of the imperialist Entente powers. Instead it proposed an alliance with the revolutionary forces of the international proletariat and the Soviet Russian proletariat, which had already come to power, and with the victorious Soviet Republic. The basis of this foreign policy concept was the idea that the rapid victory of world revolution would spread to a number of European countries which in the autumn of 1918, even in the spring of 1919, was not without some foundation. However, subsequent events proved the idea to have been inadequate as to the demands of reality. According to certain view, the communist view of world revolution in the period between 1917–1921 was a misconception, an error. Such a conclusion is in itself onesided because it comprises only a partial truth of historical reality. In fact this view can be regarded as only partially wrong, since the concept of world revolution in its entirety was not realized. There was a time, however, when this was one of the concepts of the possibility for the further progress of Europe, which the revolutionaries could not ignore. History proves that the concept, which reckoned on the approaching European successes of world revolution, contributed to the successful commencement of world revolution, to the strengthening of the first socialist state, as well as to the formation and strengthening of many communist parties.

The communist prisoners of war followed with close attention the 1918 activity of the MSzDP and in their articles exposed the manoeuvres of the social democratic leaders aimed at putting a brake on the spontaneous struggle of the workers. They exposed that the social democratic leaders, ignoring the class interests of the proletariat, had taken a stand for cooperation with the bourgeoisie and for the preservation of the capitalist system.

In the writings of the communist prisoners of war the left-wing personalities active then in Hungary, Ervin Szabó, Gyula Alpári, Jenő Landler, Jenő Hamburger, the young antimilitarists, were presented as the vanguard of Bolshevism in Hungary. Alongside of this recognition they were asked, in the interests of the proletariat, to openly break with the MSzDP. They understood that the MSzDP was incapable of leading the proletariat in the course of the realization of the tasks awaiting it and professed that in Hungary, too, it was inevitable for a new party of the proletariat, inspired by revolutionary ideas, to be established. In May 1918, Béla Kun wrote in "Mit akarnak a kommunisták?" that "new weapons, new methods of struggles are needed in the new fight which imperialism has forced on the proletariat . . . This grouping of the proletariat is the communist party."²⁵

They deemed it necessary to form a united disciplined party, similar to the Bolshevik Party. As for the party membership, they said that only such class-

²⁵ See Kun, B.: *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaságról* (On the Hungarian Republic of Councils), p. 57, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1958.

conscious proletarians could be members, who with active, consistent, uncompromising class struggle strive to liberate the working class on a national and international scale, who are internationalists and are ready to use force against the force of the bourgeois state, to take up arms for the socialist revolution, for the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship and for the victory of socialism. The knowledge the Hungarian communist prisoners of war had of the new revolutionary party showed a tremendous advance when compared with the views and practice of the Hungarian movement. At the same time this knowledge cannot be regarded as complete, even as compared to the concepts of the twenties. In 1918 the views relating to a communist party and particularly to its role in the proletarian dictatorship were in the process of being formulated even in the Bolshevik Party. At that time they had not yet summarized the experiences (to which the history of the 1918–1919 revolutions in Hungary furnished important data).

It was in the communist prisoners of war movement that the Hungarian revolutionaries heard for the first time – to quote the words of Béla Kun – “in a direct and detailed manner, about the only true revolutionary Marxism since the death of Marx and Engels, about Bolshevism”.²⁶

During the civil war they had no opportunity to make a profound and all-round study of theoretical questions. The sources of their mistakes – besides the remnants of their social democratic past – could be found in the various views which still existed in the Bolshevik Party. The Bukharinite “left-wing communist” influence was particularly evident and there was also the fact that the Hungarian communists in 1918 came to know about Bolshevism, and its core, the Leninist teachings, still in their formative stage at the time. Among these some had been later confirmed or rejected in experiments carried out in the ‘laboratory’ of history. During the short period spent in Soviet Russia they only experienced the beginning of the transition from social democratism to Leninism.

In spite of errors and shortcomings, the communist movement of Hungarian prisoners of war rendered an immeasurable service to the Hungarian workers’ movement by taking the first steps towards mastering Leninist theories and applying them to the Hungarian workers’ movement.

The leaders of the Communist Group came to the conclusion that the further advance of the Hungarian revolution demanded the immediate formation of the communist party when they heard the news of the October 1918 party congress, of the events of the Hungarian revolution in late October, of the victory of the bourgeois democratic revolution and of the pact made by the social democratic leaders – similar to that of the Mensheviks – with the bourgeois parties.

On October 24 and 25, 1918 the Hungarian Communist Group held a meeting at which they discussed the situation in Hungary and what was to be done about it. This was summarized in a declaration of principles, entitled “Kiáltvány Magyarországi Dolgozó Népehez!” (Manifesto to the Working People of Hungary!) The manifesto already underscored their opposition to the MSZDP by carrying the signature: “Kommunisták Magyarországi Szövetsége” (Hungarian Federation of Communists). The manifesto posed an independent proletarian policy against the reforms of the bourgeois democratic parties: a policy calling for the utilization of

²⁶ Kun, B.: *Válogatott írások és beszédek* (Selected Writings and Speeches), vol. 2, p. 224, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1966.

the Hungarian and international revolutionary upsurge, based on the activity and alliance of the labouring classes under the leadership of the revolutionary party of the working class and its revolutionary party, a policy aimed at a proletarian dictatorship going beyond a bourgeois democratic transformation to a proletarian revolution, towards the establishment of a republic of councils of workers, soldiers and poor peasants, and the establishment of the international federation of soviet republics.²⁷

After preliminary preparations and meetings the conference of the Hungarian communist prisoners of war was convened on November 4, 1918 in Moscow. At the proposal of Béla Kun a resolution was passed which proclaimed the founding of the Hungarian Party of Communists, to be also an organic part of the international communist movement, and elected its Central Committee. The Committee members were: the Hungarian Béla Kun, Károly Vántus and Ernő Pór, the Rumanian Arion Becariu and Emil Bozdogh, the Slovak Matej Kovac and Matej Krsak, the Yugoslav Ivan Matuzovics and Franjo Drobniak. The nationality question of contemporary Hungary were taken into consideration in electing the members of the Central Committee. (After the national minorities of Hungary joined their own national states, the Slovak, Rumanian and Serbian members of the Central Committee continued their activities in the socialist-communist movements of their respective countries.) The Central Committee was elected for a temporary period. It remained in office only until it was possible to hold a joint meeting at home with the representatives of the revolutionary workers’ movement and to declare the formation of the party and to elect a new Central Committee. The same resolution obliged the Hungarian communists to return home and join the revolutionary movement of Hungary.²⁸

The resolution of the November 4, 1918 conference still did not result in the formation of the party but was merely a declaration of intentions. The party was actually established in Hungary. The conference was, nevertheless, important because it recognized the necessity for and the possibility of the rapid formation of the communist party in Hungary and mobilized the forces of the communist prisoners of war to this end. In the spirit of the conference, in November the Group sent to Hungary some eighty agitators, trained at party schools, among them the members of the temporary Central Committee and another one to one hundred and twenty party members. Up to the time the Republic of Councils was proclaimed, the group had sent some three hundred members to do party work in Hungary. Béla Kun was among the first, on November 6, to start out for Hungary.

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²⁷ PI Archives, film library, 1961. Microfilm of the printed manifesto. Published in *Párttörténeti Közlemények*, 1964, No. 2. The Hungarian Group of OK/B/P for the establishment of the Hungarian Party of Communists (Oct.–Nov., 1918).

²⁸ For the resolution of the conference, see PI Archives, fond 966, unit 32, pp. 1–3. Microfilm of a typed copy in Russian.

The Formation of the KMP and its Historical Significance

Béla Kun under the pseudonym of Emil Sebestyén, army physician, together with Károly Vántus and others arrived in Budapest on November 17, 1918, one day after the republic was proclaimed. On the very same day they made contact with Ernő Seidler who had already come home. They solicited his help in arranging a meeting with some leaders of the revolutionary opposition at home. At two meetings held in the morning and evening of November 18, beside Kun and Vántus and Seidler Béla Vágó, Jenő László, Károly Jancsó, László Rudas and Ottó Korvin took part. The leaders of the opposition described the situation in the workers' movement at home, the events of the bourgeois democratic revolution of October, the activity and views of the leaders of the workers' movement. They spoke of the plans for establishing an "Ernő Szabó Circle" and "The Independent Group of Hungarian Socialists", and of the contacts which had been made with the revolutionary socialists and the opposition shop stewards of the more important factories. Béla Kun, in the name of the Hungarian Communist Group, expounded that in the given situation the rallying of revolutionary forces was indispensable, and this could be accomplished only with the immediate establishment of the communist party. Kun's proposals gave rise to a heated debate. Those at home first opposed the plan, they thought it premature and after the discussion only Rudas and – with some reservations – Vágó agreed to the establishment of the party.

On the same night Béla Kun went to Vienna, where on November 19 he had discussions on behalf of Lenin with Friedrich Adler and other Austrian workers' leaders. On the night of the nineteenth Kun returned to Budapest. The following day the discussion continued, in secrecy. It was still not known how the government would react to the communists organizing.

On the night of the 20th, in addition to the previously mentioned János Hirossik, Ferenc Jancsik and the opposition shop stewards of some ten factories gathered at Ottó Korvin's home. Béla Kun spoke at length of the Russian proletarian revolution and of Soviet power. Speaking of the necessity of organizing the party, he said that the organizational base of the party could not be the trade unions but the factory party organizations. "We must achieve", he said, "that the trade unions should not be dependent on the social democratic party and that its members be free to join any workers' party of their choice."²⁹

The Hungarian communists, who had returned home, endeavoured to form the new revolutionary workers' party on the basis of the broadest unity of the left-wing forces of the workers' movement. In the days following November 20, Kun negotiated with the opposition shop stewards of the larger factories, with Ede Chlepkó, József Mikulík, Rezső Fiedler and others. In the course of these discussions, Kun wrote that "... it turned out that a large number of leading shop stewards, especially of the iron workers took a definitely revolutionary stand and were not willing to allow the postponement of the class struggle heralded by the social democrats."³⁰

²⁹ Hirossik, J.: "Naplótöredék" (Fragment of a Diary), Supplement to the *Proletár*, December 30, 1920.

³⁰ PI Archives, Béla Kun's wall newspaper article in the Moscow Hungarian Club, November 1926. Published in *Társadalmi Szemle*, 1958, No. 11. Documents on the formation of the MKP.

Discussions were conducted with the "independents" led by Dezső Somló and Lajos Sikorszky, who after long debate agreed to take part in preparing for the establishment of the party. Seidler also organized a meeting between Kun and some members of the "engineers group": Armin Helfgott, Gyula Hevesi and József Kelen. They were of the opinion that it was premature to organize the party. They believed that more time was needed to prepare for the withdrawal from the MSzDP. Later, some weeks after its formation, they also joined the communist party. Fruitful discussions were carried on with the Duczynska-Sugár anti-militarist group. For some time Kun could come to no agreement with the left-wing social democrats, Gyula Alpári, Jenő Landler, Sándor Szabados, who nevertheless joined the communist movement later on.

The members of the social democratic party leadership: Jakab Weltner, János Vanczák, Zsigmond Kunfi with whom Kun also tried to reach an agreement rejected outright the plan aimed at establishing a revolutionary party.

In the meantime the members of the Hungarian groups arrived home in growing numbers. Ernő Pór, Ferenc Jancsik, Frigyes Karikás, Sándor Kellner and others resumed their old contacts in the workers' movement and under the leadership of Béla Kun took an active part in the preparatory work of forming the party. Béla Kun worked particularly hard. In his above quoted reminiscences Kun characterized the feverish activity of those days: "I spoke daily to some twenty-thirty persons individually, trying to persuade them that establishing the party was an indispensable precondition for the further advance of the revolution and for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Their receptiveness to the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat and soviet power was remarkable. They also quickly understood that the base of the movement could only be the factory. These were wonderful days, there were successful negotiations, only the need for a party could not easily be driven into their heads. Some comrades who had been taking part in the movement for a long time even though that perhaps the MSzDP could be taken over and most of them felt that because of the trade unions it was impossible for the time being to form a new party. In the ranks of the younger generations, less rooted in the workers' movement, there was a strong inclination toward syndicalism and in general they could not understand why a party was needed."³¹

Finally, however, since the majority of those who took part in the discussions accepted the concept of carrying on the revolution, and winning power by way of revolution and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, they also came to understand within a few days that all this could not be realized within the MSzDP and were won over to the idea of immediately organizing the communist party. After agreement had been reached with the majority in individual and group negotiations a conference was called for November 24, 1918 to be held at the home of József Kelen in Buda, 42 Városmajor Street. "Though there was still some hesitation, even those who still wavered a bit felt and understood that on this day in Városmajor Street the founding conference of the Hungarian Party of Communists was convened," wrote Béla Kun in his reminiscences.

³¹ Ibid.

On November 24, 1918,³² on a Sunday afternoon, the conference was opened with some thirty-five to forty persons participating. The three revolutionary trends of the Hungarian workers' movement were represented: the communist prisoners of war who held Bolshevik-Leninist ideas by Béla Kun, Ferenc Jancsik, Sándor Kellner, Ernő Pór, Ernő Seidler and Károly Vántus; the old opposition of the left-wing MSzDP and the opposition shop stewards by János Hirossik, Jenő László, László Rudas, Béla Szántó, Béla Székely, Béla Vágó, as well as Ede Chlepko, Rezső Fiedler, Aladár Hikádé, Rezső Szaton; and finally the revolutionary socialists of antimilitarist, syndicalist views by Ottó Korvin, János Lékai, Antal Mosolygó, József Mikulik, József Révai, Imre Sallai and others.

Károly Vántus presided at the meeting and Béla Kun gave the report. He spoke of the international revolutionary situation and the significance of the Russian proletarian revolution. He repeatedly dwelt on the arguments which proved the necessity of a party. "It is the obligation of the communist party", he said, "to educate and organize the Hungarian workers to carry on the revolution and aim for the conquest of political power."

The report was followed by discussion. This, however, was merely a weak rearguard action of the procrastinators. The participants at the conference declared the foundation of the Hungarian Party of Communists as a new workers' party independent of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary. The conference then opened the way to the practical organization of the party.

Subsequently, the conference discussed the tasks of agitation, propaganda and organization and agreed on the publication of a central party paper, *Vörös Újság*. Finally, the Central Committee of the Party was elected, János Hirossik, Ferenc Jancsik, Ottó Korvin, Béla Kun, Jenő László, József Mikulik, Ernő Pór, József Rabinovics, László Rudas, Ernő Seidler, Béla Szántó, Béla Vágó and Károly Vántus, and Tibor Szamuely, after he had returned home from Russia. Béla Kun was elected president of the party and János Hirossik and Károly Vántus its secretaries.³³

On the decision of the conference, in a few days, the headquarters of the central party apparatus was established in Budapest at 15 Visegrádi Street. It was here that the formation of the party was announced to some eighty to one hundred persons (besides those who attended the first meeting, there were another fifty

³² There is no authentic record as to the time of and the participants at the founding conference of the communist party. This question, therefore, has been debated for decades. Most writings between 1919 and 1948 refer to November 21 or 24 as the date of the party's foundation.

An examination of the material allows one to deduce that November 24, 1918 is the correct date. The majority of those who had taken part in the event provide more reliable proof in their memoirs as to subsequent documents of the Central Committee of the KMP that November 24 was the actual date. Even those who set the date as the 21st, say that it was on a Sunday. In 1918, Sunday in November was on the 24th.

November 24 as the day of the formation of the party seems to be corroborated by the fact that all references to that date indicate that it was not a conference of two to three days but a more lengthy series of negotiations. Regarding this question see "A Kommunizmus Magyarországi Pártja megalakulásának történetéhez" (The History of the Formation of the KMP), and "Mikor alakult meg a KMP?" (When was the KMP Established?) by the author of the present article in *Párttörténeti Közlemények*, 1958, No. 4, and 1965, No. 3.

³³ We have no authentic contemporary list of the Central Committee members. The above list has been composed from later documents. Very likely some of them were included only later on.

factory shop stewards present). At this meeting party organizers were elected and they were given the task of forming party organizations and groups.

After this meeting, organization and agitation were started with tremendous enthusiasm. Within a few weeks a party corps of leaders, agitators and organizers was formed. The various revolutionary trends which joined to form the party began to take on a unified ideological aspect the basis of which was the system of Bolshevik-Leninist ideas transmitted by the Hungarian Communist Group led by Béla Kun. The communist party's main ideological and political line coincided with the main trends of the emerging international communist movement (and its centre, the Communist International also being in the process of formation). The ideas and experiences transmitted by the communist prisoners of war gave unprecedented impetus to the rallying of Hungarian left-wing groups. They gave an impetus to the logical completion of a strongly advanced process. The discussions, as has been shown, produced quick results. One of the reasons for the rapid success was that the groups in the left-wing of the workers' movement in Hungary arrived simultaneously at essentially the same answers as the Hungarian revolutionaries active in Soviet Russia did as to the trend of the further development of Hungarian society and the role of the working class. It was this identity of basic views which resulted in the rapid realization by the representatives of the Hungarian left-wing of the need to form the new party and many of them immediately, others a few weeks later joined the KMP, and up to March 21, 1919 (when the Hungarian Republic of Councils was proclaimed) the left-wing active in the MSzDP united with the communist movement.

Without the activity of the Hungarian Communist Group and the initiative of its members who had returned from Soviet Russia, the communist party, the most important factor in the realization of the Republic of Councils, could not have been formed in November 1918. However, without the pioneering work and struggle of the Hungarian left-wing socialists and the relationship they had established with the working class, the party could not have emerged within so short a time as such a strong influential political force. The meeting of minds between those who returned home and those who remained in Hungary enabled the revolutionary forces united in the Hungarian Party of Communists, to appear, practically within days and weeks, before the workers and – according to the editorial of the first number of the *Vörös Újság* – to prepare them "for the proletarian revolution, which was inevitable, indeed already on the threshold."³⁴

Béla Kun deserves outstanding credit for the popularization of the principles and experiences of Bolshevism, and for the organization of the KMP. We can justly mention him, the founder of the communist party, the leader of the fight for the 1918–1919 proletarian revolution and for the Hungarian Republic of Councils, as a most prominent figure of Hungarian history and, even internationally, one of the most significant revolutionaries of the century. The failure for a long time to properly appreciate the role of Béla Kun is being recognized to the extent that acknowledgement has and is being given to the fact that the Hungarian Republic of Councils of 1919 was not merely an interlude in twentieth century Hungarian and world history, but the beginning (for a time a forcibly repressed overture) of the socialist transformation of Hungarian society which – though

³⁴ "Oszályharcot!" (Class War!), *Vörös Újság*, December 7, 1918.

modest in comparison with the Russian October – was nevertheless one of mankind's initial steps towards socialism.

The defenders of the bourgeois system, the various social democratic, but bourgeois politicians included – particularly regarding the role of the Hungarian communist prisoners of war as transmitters – kept repeating, from the very beginning of the communist party's formation, that Bolshevism and Leninist ideas were imported from abroad and they only reflected the specific Russian situation. They maintained that the Hungarian representative of these ideas, the communist party had no roots either in Hungarian society or in the Hungarian workers' movement. Thus, the leader of the social democratic party, Jakab Weltner, at the congress of his party on February 9, 1919, declared that the communist party "... did not spring from the soil of the Hungarian workers' movement."³⁵ Therefore he, as well as others, predicted and hoped that the communist movement would soon perish by itself and disappear.

As early as 1918 the Hungarian communists took issue with their opponents. They reminded the leaders of the MSzDP that not so very long ago the social democratic movement itself had been accused of being smuggled into Hungary by homeless blackguards, by foreign craftsmen having settled down in Hungary, by "agitators" and therefore branded as a phenomenon without roots.³⁶

The KMP was naturally not only the offspring of the social development of Hungary but also of the stormy developments of the surrounding world, of the international workers' movement, and it was an organic part of the international communist movement. The Leninist theories primarily summarized the experiences of Russian society and the Russian workers' movement, but they also revealed the most important laws governing the development of the entire capitalist society of the time. These teachings summarized and gave far-reaching consideration to the experiences of the workers' movements of other countries too.

The Hungarian communists, when they adopted the most important ideas of modern socialism, Bolshevism, also strove to apply them for the benefit of Hungarian social progress. They did what the greatest Hungarian patriots had done in the course of past centuries, they propagated the ideas of international progress. The Hungarian communists were the successors and followers of those progressive Hungarians who had earlier brought home the ideas of the bourgeois Enlightenment and the French Revolution, of those itinerant workers who in the second half of the nineteenth century, coming from western countries, brought Marxist ideas into the Hungarian workers' movement. The Hungarian enemies of these ideas and progress hastened to declare them alien and their representatives unpatriotic.

However, history settled the debate. But history itself gave full testimony to the tremendous success which the bearer of Leninist ideas, the KMP achieved at the end of 1918 and in early 1919.

News of the establishment of the new party quickly reached the factories and villages. The *Vörös Újság*, the central organ of the party, first issued on December 7, 1918 in 10,000 copies and becoming at once popular, also contributed to it.

³⁵ PI Archives, fond 658, bundle 1. Minutes of the extraordinary national general meeting of the MSzDP held on February 9, 1919.

³⁶ "Hírek" (News), *Vörös Újság*, December 14, 1918.

With this paper the party came out of illegality and disclosed its existence to the public. During the last days of November and the beginning of December the first meetings were held at the Ujpest Workers' Hostel, at the trade-union centre of iron workers, in the Galilei Circle and elsewhere where communist leaders spoke and in heated debate: exposed the opportunism of the social democratic leaders and made known the revolutionary aims of the KMP. The chief slogans of the party – preparation for a proletarian revolution, the overthrow of bourgeois power even at the price of armed uprising, the alliance of workers and peasants, the expropriation of landed estates, the proletarian dictatorship, soviet power and alliance with Soviet Russia and the formation of the Third International – provoked a mighty reaction.

Thus began the break-away of the revolutionary strata of the proletariat from the MSzDP. The first factory organizations of the communist party were soon formed. The Iron Workers' Committee (Jancsik, Karikás, Chlepkó, Fiedler, Szaton) were particularly active in the organization of factory cells, which achieved excellent results. Party organizations and fractions were organized in a whole number of factories, districts and trade unions where shop stewards, who had joined the communists, worked. They brought with them into the party the vanguard of the large factories and particularly of the organized workers. The party was strong among the ever growing mass of unemployed workers. In a short time communist organizations were established in some districts and suburbs of Budapest. Some social democratic organizations announced their affiliation to the communist party. A strong base of the revolutionary workers' party came into being in the organizations of the soldiers, the demobilized non-commissioned officers and the invalid soldiers, in some units of the militia and guardsmen where the military committee of the party carried on active and fruitful activity. Small but very influential factions existed in the Workers' Council of Budapest and in the Soldiers' Council. The national activity of the communists provided the impulse to the strengthening of power of the councils.

Communist cells and factions were formed among the clerks, the professionals and in the trade unions. Many prominent young intellectuals of Hungary joined the communist party: György Lukács, Béla Balázs, Ervin Bauer, Elek Bolgár, Béla Fogarasi and others.

The prisoners of war returning home had a large share in the formation of party organizations in the country and in the dissemination of communist views (often unsupported by the framework of organization). The stimulus of the Soviet Russian experiences which they had already made known was fortified by the establishment of the communist party. The sectors of the peasantry with little or no land, to whom the bourgeois democratic government had merely given the promise of some future but compensated land-reform (backing this up by intimidating the peasant masses who were revolting against the castles and the authorities), now expected the communists to realize the 1917–1918 agrarian policy of the Bolsheviks; the slogan for the revolutionary expropriation of land without any compensation seemed to support this.

A great number of foreign language communist groups (Rumanian, Yugoslav, Czech and Slovak, German, Russian, Russo-Ukrainian) were formed in addition to the KMP. While the social democratic national minority organizations and their representatives, which had previously been active in the party, were leaving

the MSzDP because it supported a policy of assimilation, the communist party became the center of gravitation of the communist forces of the neighbouring peoples and nations because of its internationalism and its rejection of all forms of nationalism.

The communists had many followers among young workers and intellectuals. The National Federation of Young Workers founded on November 30, 1918 had from the outset been led by young communists or sympathizers. On December 30, the organization broke with the MSzDP and functioned essentially as a communist youth organization.

The communists made contacts with all classes and layers of the working people who were concerned with social progress. The slogans of the party voiced their demands and the mass of people, who agitated for these slogans, grew with unprecedented rapidity and often while remaining in the MSzDP they strove to realize them. As a result of all this, the communist party, shortly after its establishment, became a significant factor in the life of Hungary. In March 1919 – according to the approximate figures of the Prosecuting Attorney of Budapest – the party had some 10–15,000 members in Budapest and in the provinces some 20–25,000.³⁷ Communist agitation reached and influenced hundreds of thousands. The KMP became within a short time the real leader and organizer of the Hungarian working class' struggle for the continuation of the revolution and for the realization of working class power.

In the revolutionary situation of the later part of 1918, which was pregnant with the socialist revolution, the organization of the KMP opened a new phase in the Hungarian workers' movement and the first lines of a new chapter were written in the history of the Hungarian people. The fight of the proletariat to overthrow the power of the exploiting classes attained a new and higher stage; there began the period of struggle for the victory of the socialist revolution. This aim, in spite of temporary detours of history, was never omitted from among the tasks of the Hungarian revolutionary workers' movement.

The party of the communists arose from revolutionary traditions and achievements of the Hungarian workers' movement and the MSzDP which was continuing and at the same time, by applying Leninist theories, transcending them. The working class, by founding the communist party, took a vital step forward, to fulfil its historic mission as the conscious moulder of the nations' destiny, to lead the Hungarian working peoples' fight for the realization of socialist society ensuring the advancement of the whole nation. With the birth of the Hungarian communist movement, the greatest political force and organization of Hungarian history was launched on the road rich in struggles and achievements.

³⁷ The March 17, 1919 indictment by the Prosecuting Attorney. PI Archives, fond 653, 4/1919/9977.

Society and Nation in the Hungarian Republic of Councils

by

Béla Kirschner

The Birth of the Republic of Councils

The Hungarian Republic of Councils was established on March 21, 1919 by peaceful means, without bloodshed. The bourgeois-social democrat coalition that had governed the country since October 31, 1918 reached an impasse in the spring of 1919 and the Government resigned and handed over the reins of power to the Social Democratic Party of Hungary (MSzDP). The organized working-class masses, however, were by then ranged on the side of the Hungarian Party of Communists (KMP) and they fought for Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Under the circumstances, the leadership of the MSzDP was not prepared to undertake alone the governing of the country. Basing themselves on the principles of the KMP and its fighting programme, the two working-class parties declared their merger and proclaimed the Republic of Councils on March 21, 1919.

The socialist revolution which had established the new state power was an international revolution in character; its advent was a major victory for the international proletariat in the class war against the international power of capital. The Hungarian workers were the first outside of Russia to conquer power and to put an end to capitalist exploitation. The victory of the Hungarian working class helped the Russian proletarian revolution both militarily and morally, it prevented the Entente from undisturbedly executing its plans on the Ukrainian front, it tied down a part of the French forces in the Balkans, and it accelerated the mobilization of international revolutionary forces in a number of areas. Primarily and in the first place it was international because it proved that the proletarian revolution was not the product of chance and not merely a Russian phenomenon. To quote Lenin:

"Up to now Soviet power has been victorious only in one country, among the peoples which once constituted the former Russian empire; and shortsighted people who found it exceptionally difficult to abandon routine and habits of thought, (even though they may have belonged to the socialist camp) imagined that this surprising swing towards proletarian soviet democracy was due entirely to the peculiar conditions prevailing in Russia, they thought that perhaps the specific features of this democracy reflected, as in a distorting mirror, the peculiar feature of the old Tzarist Russia. If there was ever any grounds for such an opinion, there is certainly none whatever now."¹

¹ Lenin, V. I.: *Collected Works*, vol. 29, p. 221, Progress Publishing House, Moscow, 1965.

The Hungarian Republic of Councils came into being in a different way than the Russian Soviet Power, making it unequivocally clear that revolution and the "bloody road" were not identical. The method of the proletarian revolution, and the form its victory takes depend on the means of battle and the comportment of the opponent.

The fact that within barely five months, the bourgeois democratic revolution in Hungary had grown into a socialist revolution, also decided the question as to which one of the various trends of the international working-class movement best accorded with the real interests of the proletariat and the nation as a whole. The precept that with the advent of imperialism in Europe the historical stage had been set for the overthrow of the bourgeois system and simultaneously for the preparation of the working class for the struggle for power, had only been accepted in a theoretical way, rather than as a practical political necessity. Even in those countries where a bourgeois revolution had taken place at the end of the war, the opportunist leadership of the working class did not conceive the democratic changes as a part and precondition of the struggle of the direct achievement of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It did not regard as the strategic task the fight for hastening the conditions for a transition to a socialist revolution immediately following the victory of the bourgeois revolution. It did not regard the revolution as permanent though in some countries the bourgeois revolution had taken place in spite of the bourgeoisie and was, objectively at first directed against the bourgeoisie.

The Hungarian socialist revolution not only proved that the dictatorship of the proletariat was the inevitable product of the internal contradictions of the imperialist world system. It also showed that a working-class party which, in the strategic sense, accepts the victory of the bourgeois democratic revolution as the end of the struggle, necessarily ends up betraying the working class. Because of the character and basic contradictions of imperialism, the creation of a genuine democracy objectively became the problem or the struggle between the forces of counter-revolution and those of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Hungarian March reflected in its totality the international and national content of the proletarian revolution and the close interconnection, unity and cohesion of the two. The Entente powers had, in fact, directly threatened the national integrity of Hungary, and thus patriotism played a significant role in the resignation of the petty-bourgeois democratic government.² But Hungary is a small country, the stability of the fight for socialism and national independence was therefore linked to the international revolutionary forces and the fate of the international revolution, above all, to its alliance with Soviet Russia.

² The government resigned on March 20, 1919. That government was not altogether identical with the coalition government which had been formed on October 31, 1918. Pressure from the masses and the dissatisfaction of the bourgeoisie had led to a governmental crisis early in January, resulting in its resignation on January 8 and to the formation of a new government, with Dénes Berinkey as Prime Minister. The Executive Committee of the National Council had proclaimed Count Mihály Károlyi, the former Prime Minister, President of the Republic. The social democrats were allotted four portfolios by Berinkey, as against the earlier two, and Gyula Peidl and Vilmos Böhm joined the government in addition to Ernő Garami and Zsigmond Kunfi. Böhm became Minister of War. István Nagyatádi Szabó of the Smallholders Party was also included in the government as the representative of the well-to-do peasantry.

The Hungarian proletarian revolution was at the same time an inevitable product of the contradictions of Hungarian society and the result of the processes within international imperialism.

The victory of the Republic of Councils did not merely reflect the fact that the attempt aimed at the realization of the bourgeois democratic measures had been made possible by the peculiar concurrence of historic circumstances and power relations, but it also showed that, in Hungary, bourgeois democracy could not overcome the obstacles to national progress. It proved that only a proletarian revolution could create the conditions for a genuine solution of the social problems and contradictions in Hungary. History posed the decisive question: the alternative was either the transformation of the bourgeois democratic revolution into a socialist revolution, or the introduction of even more reactionary social relations in Hungary than those which had prevailed before October 1918. As a result, the victorious working-class power was not simply an expression of proletarian interests but a national necessity, the result of objective processes and the means of satisfying objective needs. Therefore, it showed that the interests of the working class and of national development were two sides of the same process and formed a cohesive whole: that genuine national progress – in the complex meaning of the term – was not possible in the period of imperialism without the working class.

In opposition to October 1918, the demand to develop the bourgeois revolution indicated that the working class had matured sufficiently for it to become the leading class of the nation, and to fulfil the role that accorded with its objective situation in capitalist society. The formation of its own revolutionary party made it possible for the working class to find its way amidst the complex problems arising from the peculiarities of Hungarian conditions. The revolutionary autumn of 1918 and spring 1919 also proved that other classes, whether consciously or not, also recognized this role.

The acceptance and realization of the leading role of the working class had not, of course, occur at a single stroke, nor was it free of contradictions. The reason for this was not only that the organization of the workers into a class had taken many decades, but that the big bourgeoisie that had come into being at the turn of the century, had, in alliance with the big landowners, created such a conservative anti-democratic bourgeois state that had made it impossible to assert bourgeois democratic civic liberties. Important strata of society, such as the middle class and the intelligentsia, adjusted to the dualist system, demanding no more than certain liberal reforms. After 1867, the working class had to fight for the building of class organizations, for the acquisition of Marxism and for the minimum of economic and political rights, amidst difficult socio-economic conditions.³

In view of the complex Hungarian situation and the state of the international working-class movement at the time, this process, in the course of asserting itself, necessarily had to go through stages replete with contradictions. A factor which contributed to the difficulties was that the MSzDP, the party of the working class, had already, at the turn of the century, gone over to reformism. This was accompanied by extraordinary dangers. In Hungary, too, imperialism brought the strengthening of reaction and the growth of social conflicts in its wake. All the

³ See Edit S. Vincze's study in this volume.

unsolved social problems, such as national independence, the problem of democracy, the peasant a nationality question once again came to the fore. Since all these questions could only be solved in a revolutionary way, the situation objectively thrust into the foreground the social role of the working class. The bourgeoisie which lacked experience in government and lacked a democratic tradition, because of its class limitations and political views was unsituated for solving such problems. As a result of the conservative role it played in the power-structure of the Habsburg Monarchy it opposed social progress and particularly any revolutionary change in the contemporary social structure. The other classes or sections of society either opposed any substantial change in the prevailing political institutions, or their role in society, their lack of organization and the inadequacy of their political platform made it impossible for them to satisfy the objective needs and demands of social progress. The grouping of class forces and the historical objectives awaiting solution also indicated that a positive attitude to decisive questions of national progress and the creative application of Marxism to Hungarian conditions formed an inseparable whole. This meant, in the given circumstances that though the contradiction between capital and labour had become fundamental in Hungarian society, the consequence of the existing anti-democratic power-structure was that it had become timely for a new revolution to solve the delayed basic democratic tasks. The large estates that still had feudal features played an important role in determining the character of the revolution because the reactionary political structure was, in many respects, tied up with the large estates, with its "Prussian"-type development and also because a democratic revolution without the peasantry could only end in defeat. The working class on the other hand could not, in the absence of democratic relations or at least their temporary existence, try to establish the power of the proletariat with any hope of victory. *The victory of the democratic revolution was therefore the precondition of the proletarian revolution, the two revolutions thus did not merely confront each other, they also formed an 'integral' whole; only a democratic revolution could create the possibility for the transformation into a proletarian revolution.*

Since the established power expressed the alliance of the big bourgeoisie and large-estate owners, the struggle for a democratic transformation, had they wanted to carry it through consistently, could only have been fought without and in spite of the bourgeoisie and necessarily it also had to become a revolution against big capital and such a revolution which had to be approached from the angle of the antagonism between labour and capital. It therefore had to be defined as the path leading directly to the socialist revolution. In other words, in Hungary the order of the day was not the realization of a "usual" or "normal" bourgeois democracy, but of a more popular and more democratic revolution which would put power, in the form of a workers'-peasants' democratic dictatorship into the hands of the working class and the peasantry. This at the same time brought to the forefront the struggle for a transition to the proletarian revolution.

An examination of the period in this context clearly shows that the responsibility of the Social Democratic Party as well as the importance of its policies, grew following the turn of the century. As the most leftist party in the country, representing the interests of the working class, it could only fulfil its historic mission, if it asserted the validity of Marxist doctrines, and, what was of equal importance, if

it understood the true demands of the period, elaborated them, and furthered their implementation. The 1903 Programme of the MSzDP unequivocally established that development "for the first time created the preconditions for ending the thousand years of oppression and exploitation ... The class contradictions are becoming ever more acute ... a new social order has to be established" and this historical task can only be carried out by the proletariat "if it conquers political power."⁴

It did not, however, understand what conditions and means were needed for a revolutionary solution of the democratic transformation, nor how closely connected these were with the socialist revolution. The Hungarian social democratic leadership was not particularly interested in theoretical questions, eclecticism in action was, however, intermingled with many sound objectives and with much honest criticism of the absurdities of society. Their tactics, along with the constructive features, indicated a misconception of concrete power relations, a stress on incorrect, inappropriate weapons, in absoluteness, unprincipledness and opportunism.⁵

Following the turn of the century the leadership of the MSzDP carried out its historic mission only to a limited extent. This also explains why, following the victory of the 1918 bourgeois democratic revolution, a petty-bourgeois democratic system was established with the active participation of the social democrats, rather than a worker-peasant dictatorship.

However, the events of October reflected, though in a peculiar and vague manner, that a positive change had occurred in the traditional social system. True, the bourgeois character of the system was maintained, but a shift in political power had nevertheless taken place. The government was the most democratic the country had ever had, composed of parties which did not expressly represent the power of the latifundia and big capital but, in Béla Kun's words, "the system of private property in general."⁶

Though the MSzDP participated in the government, this did not automatically mean that the working class had achieved power, but its socio-political position did change fundamentally, and its democratic rights were extended. The victory of the revolution and the proclamation of the Republic on November 16, 1918 – a cherished revolutionary heritage for communists to this very day – meant that the working class had, though only temporarily and for a short time, become the leading class of the nation and despite the opportunist policy of the MSzDP its will could not be left unnoticed.

The victory of the bourgeois democratic revolution had thus created a contradictory situation. There was a kind of "dual power" with the bourgeois-social democrat government coalition on one side, and the revolutionary organizations of the working class on the other. Workers' councils were formed in the factories and workshops which introduced workers' control, dismissed managers, and demanded the nationalization of enterprises.

⁴ The minutes of the Tenth Party Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary, held in Budapest, April 12, 13 and 14, 1903. *Népszava*, 1903. (MMTVD, vol. 3, pp. 138–139.)

⁵ See Tibor Erényi's study in this volume.

⁶ Kun, B.: *Válogatott írások és beszédek* (Selected Writings and Speeches), vol. 2, p. 99, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1966.

The victory of the revolution also brought about favourable conditions for the organization of the communist party, the truly revolutionary party of the working class. Its formation created the conditions for the Hungarian working class to fulfill its historic mission. It assumed the responsibility for the further development of the revolution and for transforming it into a socialist revolution. Though the communist party was small in number as compared with the MSzDP whose membership, as a result of the revolutionary upheaval, had grown to hundreds of thousands, the influence of the communist party, because of the larger proportion of conscious, active members, soon exceeded that of the social democrats. The influence of the communist party on the social democratic left-wing and on local officials, who were looking for a clear answer to the problems of the masses, was constantly growing.

In the period from October to March – which can be further subdivided – the movement and grouping of class forces went through a number of contradictory processes, in the course of which the revolutionary forces suffered more than one defeat. The government's policy finally failed even though the policy of the government – and that of the social-democrat leadership – had to go through significant changes. Since the contradiction between capital and labour had gradually become the main contradiction of society, the choice between counter-revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat became the dominant question of the day. As a result, the carrying out of the objectives of the democratic revolution became the task also of the proletarian revolution. The democratic and the socialist revolutionary processes developed concomitantly and in mutual interdependence.

The seeming power and basis of the government disappeared relatively quickly. By March it had neither the domestic nor the external support that would have been necessary for it to maintain a relative equilibrium between the classes for any length of time. The government was no longer in a position to cope with a major political crisis, so that the failure of the bourgeois-social-democrat coalition was unavoidable. This situation also put the MSzDP in a dilemma. The crisis was created by a note continuing our ultimatum, submitted by Lieutenant-Colonel Vix⁷ of the French Army, demanding the evacuation of further Hungarian territories. This crisis made it impossible for the government to secure a further moratorium which would postpone its demise.

In that situation the social-democratic leadership had to decide on either forming a common front with the proletariat, or retreating and thus – their intentions notwithstanding – open the flood-gates to counter-revolution. The government dared neither to reject the note, nor to accept it and thus it resigned, giving way to the social democrats. The fact that the MSzDP had not the courage to assume sole responsibility for government and was ready to unite with the Hungarian Party of Communists did not only indicate the bankruptcy of the social-democrat leadership, but also the victory of KMP policy. At the same time it reflected the sense of responsibility of some centre and left-wing social-democrats.

⁷ Lieutenant-Colonel Vix of the French Army presented the ultimatum to the government on March 20, 1919. The note demanded that Hungarian forces be withdrawn from a large part of the country within ten days. This was the territory in the South and South-East, inhabited by Hungarians, including Szeged, Hódmezővásárhely, Orosháza and Debrecen. Acceptance of this note would have meant a substantial reduction in the country's territory.

The union of the KMP and the MSzDP was preceded by a fierce struggle between them. The formation of the Hungarian Party of Communists on November 24, 1918 did not simply mean that some sort of opposition to the MSzDP had appeared. It expressed the historical necessity, deriving from current social contradictions which could not be solved by the government policy of that time. Accordingly, the programme of the communist party, which included a direct transition to a socialist revolution and the socialist revolution itself, provided an answer to the burning questions that troubled Hungarian society. The communist party was aware that the revolution could be carried to a further stage only by fighting the government and the leadership of the social democratic party, by winning over the spontaneously formed soldiers' and workers' councils, and by gradually extending the power of these councils as against that of the government. The communist party did not, however, reject a possible rapprochement of the two working-class parties. It did not consider the avoidance of a fratricidal struggle merely in terms of a break between revolutionary workers and the MSzDP, but also in terms of a break between the social democrat leadership and the bourgeois government and the bourgeois conception of democracy, and their acceptance of the proletarian road to the further extension of the revolution. This view was expounded by the communist caucus at the January 8 meeting of the Budapest Workers' Council⁸ where ways of coping with the January governmental crisis were discussed. This crisis was closely connected with the rapidly growing influence of the communist party, the revolutionization of the masses and the contradictions within the ranks of the bourgeoisie. The communists summed up the preconditions of cooperation with the social democrats as follows: "Class struggle against the bourgeois state, the arming of the proletariat against the bourgeois counter-revolution, the undelayed occupancy of the land by councils of the agricultural poor. The institutionalizing of workers' control in large enterprises as a transitional form to workers' administration and the taking over of the means of production by the proletarian state. The reorganization of the council of Budapest workers' delegates in such a way as to transform it from a party institution into a class institution of proletarians, as their organ of struggle and power. The Budapest Workers' Council must call a congress of councils without delay."⁹

Though the Workers' Council declared in favour of upholding the government coalition, the communist caucus of the Budapest Soldiers' Council passed a resolution on February 7, reiterating the intention to cooperate with the MSzDP. The resolution argued that the "counter-revolutionary movement is assuming such proportions in Hungary that the time has come for the proletariat to declare that the republic is in danger, and that emergency measures have to be put into effect, to put down the counter-revolution."¹⁰ It was therefore proposed to form a cen-

⁸ The Budapest Workers' Council was formed on November 2, 1918. The leadership of the MSzDP, the Trade-Union Council; the Executive Committee of the Party; and delegates of the various party bodies, institutions and trade union leaderships were its ex officio members. The Budapest Workers' Council was led by the MSzDP and this from the outset, fully determined its standpoint. In the course of events, however, as the masses were being revolutionized, opposition to its opportunist policy grew stronger within the Budapest Workers' Council as well.

⁹ *Vörös Újság*, January 11, 1919.

¹⁰ *Vörös Újság*, February 19, 1919.

tral revolutionary committee, to be the central organ of the armed forces, on which the Budapest Workers' Council, the Social Democratic Party of Hungary, and the Hungarian Party of Communists would all be represented. The possibility of cooperation was also indicated, though in a more indirect way, at workers' meetings organized by communist organizations in Budapest and its environs, which were also addressed by social Democrats. The acceptance of the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat was to be the basis of such cooperation.

At the same time the communist party leadership naturally also reckoned with the possibility that the Russian July of 1917 could be repeated in Hungary. At the time, the Russian "dual power" ended with the victory of the bourgeoisie, making a peaceful revolutionary transition to socialism impossible; the counter-revolution began and communists were arrested. That is why measures were taken to ensure that the communists continue to operate even in conditions of illegality. When, on February 21,¹¹ many communist leaders were in fact arrested, communist organizations continued to function and the preparations for an armed rising were accelerated. At the same time, however, those members of the MSzDP leadership who wished to go beyond bourgeois democracy and whose demands approximated the objectives of the communist party had become more active. This did not yet mean that the left-wing social democrats were determined to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, or to unite with the communists. It did, however, mean that parallel with the rise in influence of the working masses and the effect of the upsurge of the German proletarian movement, their conceptions became more radical, and the demand was growing amongst some of the officials that the internecine struggle be ended. The early March resolution of the Workers' Council and the social democratic leadership, calling on the communist workers to join the MSzDP, has to be seen from this point of view. This was a reversal of the MSzDP's February 9 Congress resolution which had expelled communists from the party, as well as of the January 28 Budapest Workers' Council resolution which had meant the expulsion of communists from the Workers' councils. Obviously, this resolution, and the articles urging its implementation, by no means meant that the disagreements between the two parties had been overcome. It was on the basis of this awareness that some social democrat leaders sought contact with the arrested communists in order to ascertain their attitude regarding the conditions for the unification of the two parties. A letter written by Béla Kun¹² to Ignác Bogár, a social democrat, on March 11, shows that the communists saw two ways of achieving this union: either an agreement with

¹¹ Anti-communist provocations began to increase in January. The Budapest Workers' Council carried a resolution on January 28 stating that communists were to be expelled from its ranks and from the trade unions. On February 3, police units ransacked the editorial offices of *Vörös Újság*, the KMP's paper. Communist leaders were arrested at dawn on February 21. The previous day there had been a mass meeting of the unemployed and they had marched over to the office of *Vörös Újság* where communist leaders addressed the crowd. Later they went on to the offices of *Népszava*, the central organ of the MSzDP, to demonstrate against that party's policy. In the evening, the police and assault units had fired on each other in the confusion and conditions of poor visibility. Next day, on the basis of a previously prepared list, almost every known leader of the communist party was arrested and party offices were closed down. However, there was no break in the continuity of leadership and those who were free formed a new leadership.

¹² Kun, B.: *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaságról* (On the Hungarian Republic of Councils), pp. 139-148, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1958.

the revolutionary wing of the MSzDP, or uniting with the MSzDP as a whole, providing it accepts the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The plan for the realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat differed from the Russian model. This could not be otherwise, since it had to consider all those circumstances which made up the essential components of the Hungarian revolutionary situation, primarily, that members of the leadership of the MSzDP of Hungary were sharply at variance in their evaluation of the concrete revolutionary objectives. The conflicts between the party's masses and the leadership were becoming more acute though there was no organizational break between the workers and the party. Relations between the Budapest Workers' Council and the social democrat leadership, and the role of the MSzDP within the government also differed to a certain extent from the policy of the Menshevik leadership. And finally, the possibility could not be precluded that a rapid development of the working class' role would produce the sort of revolutionary crisis which would force the leadership of the MSzDP to change its policy.

Barely ten days after Béla Kun's March 11 letter, the social democratic leadership did find itself in a position which made it impossible to continue its earlier policy. The coalition government was unable to face the consequences of the Vix note and a purely social democrat government, even if formed, would also have proved unequal to the task and the masses expected a revolutionary solution. In that situation the majority of the party leadership, on the initiative of the left wing which honestly desired working-class unity, and the centre which had reservations, decided in favour of unity with the communists on March 21.

The decision was, in the first place, due to the fact that the proletarian masses had become alienated from the official social-democrat leadership. The right-wing leaders were therefore unable to influence the course of events, even though the proletariat had not organizationally abandoned the MSzDP. The recognition by the coalition partners that their political position had become untenable because they had not obtained the support of the Entente powers, was also an important factor in the decision of the MSzDP leadership. On the other hand, an international revolution could be counted upon and the possibility of direct military contact with Soviet Russia could not be excluded. Additional factors were the disorganization of the counter-revolutionary forces, the agreement of the overwhelming majority of the peasantry with the standpoint of the working class and the neutrality of the minority was too small a base for any attempt by hostile wealthy peasants to abort the unfolding of the revolution. A favourable process took place among the intelligentsia as well. The urban petty-bourgeoisie was not organized and was in the main taking a position of positive expectation.

Implicit in the reasons which forced and persuaded the MSzDP's leadership to accept the platform of the dictatorship of the proletariat was that a substantial part of this leadership did not at one stroke become genuine adherents of the proletarian revolution. Though negative consequences might have been expected, the communist leaders very properly subordinated such considerations to the basic question of who would seize power, the proletarian revolution or the forces of the counter-revolution. The alternatives of revolution or counter-revolution meant that at the given historical moment the merger of the parties was the only stand possible. Developments at home and abroad both demanded a prompt decision. The Communist Party was unable to seize power alone. It was

still weak organizationally and the working classes had at the time only become disillusioned with the opportunist policies of the MSzDP's leadership, and not with the Party as such. The working class would not have understood had the communist party rejected the merger after the leadership of the MSzDP, with one or two exceptions, had accepted the principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Nor was there time for the party to ascertain who were the sincere adherents of the proletarian revolution, and who merely pretended to be for other reasons.

The merger of the two parties not only made it possible for the conceptions of the most progressive forces in Hungarian society to be realized, it was also its precondition. Thus, the socialist revolution became national not only as to its objectives, but also in that it embraced the great majority of the nation, and because its victory was based on a genuine alliance of the best elements of the nation.

There was no resistance anywhere, neither in the capital nor in the provinces. The armed forces and the masses supported the revolution. In the months of bourgeois democracy the workers had been on the alert, guarding against the formation of armed counter-revolutionary units in Budapest. There was no political alternative at that moment that could have been counterposed successfully to the programme of the Governing Council.

Some Features of a Socialist Society in the Process of Construction

The period which followed the victory of the proletarian revolution produced a particularly peculiar stage of development in the class struggle. The proletariat was able to seize power because the overwhelming majority of the people had been convinced that the programme advocated by the KMP expressed the interests of the working class and of the nation as a whole. The seizure of power, however, was merely the first step. The practical implementation of the programme proclaimed by the revolution was a far more complex task. The economic foundation of the new power had to be laid, and on this basis those of actual government were to follow.

In this respect the position of the Hungarian socialist revolution was more favourable than that of the Russian and not only because it was able to profit from the example and experience of the Russian revolution. It was easier also because a peaceful victory facilitated the rapid introduction of revolutionary rules and regulations. The fact itself that the new type of power had been implemented throughout the country without major shocks or resistance, and that its class-composition essentially satisfied the demands of the dictatorship of the proletariat, created the possibilities for starting to fulfil the tasks of public administration.¹³

¹³ The temporary constitution promulgated on April 2, 1919 determined the structure of the Council system. Communal, urban, rural district and county councils were formed throughout the country and district councils were elected in Budapest, with a Budapest Central Council as the higher authority. Supreme power was exercised by the National Assembly of worker-soldier and peasant councils elected by county and urban councils. The Revolutionary Governing Council carried out the functions of government. Council elections were started on April 7. Everyone over eighteen years of age, who lived by useful labour had the right to vote and stand for election. The constitution ensured

It is true that many members of the old bureaucracy were retained by the new state apparatus, more in fact than could be justified by the need for trained personnel. The majority continued to cling faithfully to their old world outlook and bourgeois morals, even if not publicly, and many even acted in accordance with their unrelinquished anti-revolutionary convictions or were indifferent to the cause represented by the new power. The revolutionary leaders of councils lacked experience, and not everywhere was there unity in the administrative bodies as to the readiness for revolutionary sacrifice. The activity of the administrative apparatus of the Republic of Councils reflected that no new type of officials, knowledgeable in government administration, had developed during the time of the bourgeois democratic revolution, that there were conflicts within the Party, and that the international position of the Republic of Councils had not changed. Despite the hardships, the majority of councils proved themselves both in performing their tasks and in revolutionary loyalty. The young council system reflected that essential class-difference which advantageously differentiated it from the old state power. Even if its antecedents had been much more favourable, it would still have displayed all the earmarks of the transitional state which necessarily accompany the transition from capitalism to socialism. However, the trend of the 1919 Republic of Councils met the requirements of the state power of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Certain bourgeois hangovers were, no doubt, present, but these played a subordinate, secondary role.

The likelihood of counter-revolutionary actions did not come to an end with the assumption of power. Subsequent counter-revolutionary coups proved this. Bearing this in mind and also that the general experience of revolutions was that the construction of the new social order, socialist transformation, is accompanied by the pressures of the old society, the anarchy of its disintegrating elements, new organs of punitive public power were immediately formed to carry out the functions of the militia. These were the Red Guard and the Revolutionary Tribunal which had the character of a people's court. But they could not fulfil their real functions because the Red Guards incorporated the old police force and because the Revolutionary Tribunal was compelled to carry out the ordinary work of law courts, since the Commissariat of Justice, dominated by social democrats, kept on postponing the establishment of proper law courts. This function not only meant the beginning of that process in which the overcoming of resistance played a dominant role, but also the emergence of the activities of the apparatus that protects the legal order by laws and decrees.

The Revolutionary Governing Council saw these organs not as sharpening the class struggle but rather as a means of mitigating internal class conflicts. The day after the revolution, *Vörös Újság* declared: "We want to avoid bloodshed in the future, too... Red Terror becomes necessary only where White Terror is in operation. The bourgeoisie had better take note of this... the proletariat would be justified in demanding a reckoning for its blood and sweat from the bourgeoisie. It does not. But it does most decisively demand that the bourgeoisie refrain from

the right to recall council members. Electorates were defined on a territorial basis. The final constitution was promulgated by the National Assembly of Councils on June 23, 1919. It defined spheres of competence and established the Central Executive Committee in addition to the National Assembly and the Governing Council, with the right to control the Governing Council.

trying to block the liberation of its former slaves."¹⁴ There was a twofold reason for this standpoint. One, that the methods employed by the proletarian revolution depended on the attitude and behaviour of the opposition and second, that the dictatorship of the proletariat was regarded as leading to a rapid abolition of classes and class conflicts.

This latter concept was the reason why a large section of bourgeois intellectuals and the professional classes were given a role in the new economic mechanism at the time of the expropriation of the expropriators and the laying of the economic foundations of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The very best of the creative intelligentsia, scholars, painters, composers and others, had lined up with working-class power, a number of them, like Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók, accepted responsibilities in the cultural field. In March 1919, the majority of the technical intelligentsia of the "working bourgeoisie" accepted, and others took cognizance of, the new power relations. This fact, in contrast to the Russian Revolution, also expedited the Republic of Councils' employment of bourgeois professionals on the very morrow of the revolution. This relationship, however, was made difficult by the fact that these people did not fully accept the leading role of the working class, they continued in the illusion of standing "above classes", and approached democracy from the side of "universal humanism". The ideology of the majority was a hodgepodge of nationalist petty-bourgeois and bourgeois views. Though these factors were not manifested simultaneously and not throughout, nor in all cases at the time of the Republic of Councils, it was nonetheless essential for an ideological and political struggle to be carried on against mistaken views and concepts. And if, at time, there was a certain impatience in this field, it was not typical. The prevailing view in the leading bodies of the revolution was that the intelligentsia were not the bootlickers of the bourgeoisie, but the bearers and creators of technological and cultural values. This was the attitude from which the right alliance policy started out, which forgot neither the historical path travelled by the intelligentsia nor the need to create the conditions which the dictatorship of the proletariat demanded.

The laying of the economic foundations of the proletarian revolution naturally required that industry, mining, transportation, banks, insurance companies, large stores, etc. be taken into public ownership. The conquest of economic power is, however, only a start, only the initial step in the direction toward socialism. The capitalist class is not destroyed when it is deprived of private property, because its power, connections, experience, force of habit, etc. All further the retention of its influence. Consequently, the socialist revolution has to create such a change in proprietorship which makes it impossible for the bourgeoisie to reproduce itself as a class. Furthermore, a stable system of production has to be created which ensures the control of production and consumption in the interest of the proletariat. Numerous measures were taken in this field during the 133 days of the dictatorship of the proletariat which can serve as most instructive examples. This included not only the Materials Control Office, the local and district industrial councils and the National Economic Council, which had the task of uniformly guiding and controlling economic activities, but also extended to factors such as labour discipline, the introduction of the obligation to work, of a wages and prices

¹⁴ *Vörös Újság*, March 22, 1919.

policy, and the best utilization of manpower, all of which the leaders of the new government had to solve without having had any previous experience to rely on. A most important task, an indispensable precondition for the assertion of working class interests, was the creation of factory democracy and, above all, the enforcement of the controlling role of the workers' council. The essence of this was that the working class not only had an objective role in the formation of socialist production relations, but that the individual workers had to regard the plant as their own. Naturally, these were only the first steps toward socialism and understandably contained all the symptoms of the concrete economic situation of Hungary resulting from the difficulties created by the deteriorated state of the economy and the imperialist blockade. There was a certain amount of haste, an effort to create socialism immediately which, among other things, made itself also apparent in the rapid nationalization of commerce and the workshops of artisans.

The gravest mistake in the economic field, which also had a bearing on the worker-peasant alliance, was the failure to distribute the land. The Revolutionary Governing Councils Decree XXXVIII of April 3, declared the large and middle estates the property of the proletarian state, to be worked by the agricultural proletariat on a cooperative basis. Small and dwarf holdings were left in private ownership.¹⁵

This way of solving the agrarian question indicated that the leaders of the Republic of Councils had not grasped the fact that in Hungary, just as in Russia, the execution of the agrarian revolution was of prime importance to the proletarian power. It is true that the dictatorship of the proletariat put an end to the latifundia in the old sense and created cooperatives covering seven and a half million holds. Its agrarian policy nevertheless did not satisfy the historic demand of the given period; the working class power did not assuage the land hunger of the peasantry. The form of expropriation of the latifundia was not accompanied by any essential change in the way they had been run. The former owners remained as managers in many places, so that in agriculture the socialist relations of production were rather only formally realized. Those of the rural proletariat, who did not join the producers' cooperatives, found themselves in an extremely difficult situation owing to a lack of work and material means, and were made good use of by the well-to-do-farmers for their own benefit.

The failure of the Republic of Councils' leaders to understand the peasant question arose not only from their misconception of the role the Russian agrarian revolution had in the victory of the proletarian revolution, but also because they drew incorrect conclusions from the fact that capitalist development had progressed further in Hungarian agriculture than in Russia. Another factor was that, because of the slogan "introduce socialism without delay", they deemed it necessary for socialist agriculture to be created instantly. They interpreted peasant proprietorship in a doctrinaire fashion, thinking only of the continuity of production and of ensuring an uninterrupted supply of food to the towns. The basis of all this was that the earlier agrarian programme of the MSZDP had emphasized the "cooperative" form of agriculture and thus at the time of the proletarian revolution the insistence was naturally on socialist large-scale production

¹⁵ The Land Act can be found in *Tanácsköztársaság*, (the government gazette of the dictatorship of the proletariat), of April 4, 1919.

and this was further supported by the fact that the great land-seizure movements of February and March had also found a cooperative solution.

Facts show that the majority of the members of the cooperatives and the poor peasants had opposed the forces of the counter-revolution right to the bitter end. The active and permanent alignment of its most revolutionary section with socialism depended, nevertheless, on whether or not there would be land reform. Some of the middle peasants continued to support the Republic of Councils though they feared socialization and viewed socialist large farms as competitors. In the main, they were neutral, which meant that neither reaction, nor the Republic of Councils was able to win their active support. The considerable deterioration of the international situation, from the point of view of the revolution, did not change the attitude and behaviour of these sections to the extent that would enable the reactionary forces to set off the fuse of a national revolt.

Parallel with these political and economic measures significant steps were taken in the fields of social and cultural policy. The Revolutionary Governing Council took countless measures to improve the situation of the working people following their assuming power. The eight-hour workday was put into effect, wages were substantially raised and the low wages for women were eliminated. Unoccupied premises and large dwellings of the rich were used to alleviate the housing shortages. Social insurance was extended and medical treatment was given free of charge. Child care was regarded by the Revolutionary Governing Council as a major obligation. School and kindergarden children were taken to bathe free of charge and vacations were arranged for the children of the proletariat.

The planned reform of public education and a number of other measures were designed to implement the objectives of the cultural policy. Church schools were nationalized, and the plan was to introduce eight-year compulsory and uniform people's schools. A crusade against illiteracy was initiated and the propagation of knowledge was extended so as to raise the cultural level of the masses. The museums, libraries and theatres were made accessible to the masses. Privately owned museum pieces were made public property, and an exhibition of this wealth of material was arranged.

As for the policy in education and science and the conceptions regarding the arts, there was the effort to eliminate the barriers to long standing democratic strivings and to elaborate principles to confirm with the requirement of the times. There undoubtedly were also such trends and ideas which were, in fact, opposed to the principles of socialism.

Society at the time of the Republic of Councils was a class society which had only taken the first steps on the road to socialism. It was a transitional society which, by means of the dictatorship of the proletariat, was preparing the foundation of the new social relations of production. The working class was its leading force, a force which played a decisive role at every stage of the new state power. Its revolutionary organs of power created not only in form something entirely new in Hungarian society, but it was a state power of such new content, which was accompanied by a complete realignment of society, thereby creating an alliance of the soundest elements of the nation. The complete elimination of all class contradictions was one of the aims proclaimed right from the start. This was considered possible because, through economic measures, an immediate end had been put to the political and economic power of the two ruling classes, the large-estate

owners and big capitalist class and the most essential steps for the creation of a new mechanism of production were taken. The dictatorship brought democracy to the great majority of the nation, despite the fact that neither the dictatorship nor democracy were able to develop to their full extent.

The indicated direction led to the transformation of society. The views on how to further this also outlined the perspectives of national development. Naturally, in the complicated historic situation, tendencies that conflicted with these objectives were also asserted. These made it more difficult to implement the general guidelines and increased the difficulties which were already serious enough and were further complicated by the fact that the revolutionary forces were not united in their appraisal of a number of basic questions.

In this situation the greatest obstacle to the proletarian power, after barely a month's existence, was the open counter-revolutionary intervention by the armed forces of the Rumanian and Czech bourgeoisie. As a result, *the first Hungarian dictatorship of the proletariat found itself in a situation where it simultaneously had to implement new social changes and fight a war of national independence.*

National Independence and the Equality of Nations

The demand for national self-determination had towards the end of the war taken hold of public opinion to such an extent that there was hardly a political trend in Central or Eastern Europe that did not accept it in some form, as part of its programme or as a slogan. It was, however, interpreted in widely differing ways, but similar to that extent, in that in each country it was made to conform with the nationalism of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie, and for a variety of reasons, it was accepted, to a smaller or larger degree, by the masses as well. The social democratic parties either accepted this interpretation, or else lacked the strength to counterbalance this process of sudden nationalist enthusiasm. The communist parties or groups were only in the initial stage of gathering strength and the majority was not yet able to counteract these tendencies.

At the time when proletarian power was in the process of realization, the leaders of the Hungarian Republic of Councils were confronted with the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois nationalism of the neighbouring countries. There was also the threat of invasion, since the leaders of the new countries were prepared to do all they could to arrest the revolutionary fervour in their countries. The Council Government therefore was not only concerned with the consequences arising from the rejection of the Vix note. Besides, both the communists and the social democrats, who occupied major party or government posts, were well aware that imperialism could only be liquidated by spreading the international proletarian revolution, and so also ensure the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Hungary. Therefore, every source of strength had to be utilized so as to create the conditions absolutely essential for the defence of the country and freedom against the impending interventionist attack. All this demanded a strengthening of the military and diplomatic positions of the Republic of Councils, a revision and rejection of the earlier national-minority policy, and the implementation of a new, internationalist national-minority policy.

The leaders of the Republic of Councils had no intention whatever of engaging in warfare with the national-nationality states that had come into existence following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Their attitude was formulated on the day following the seizure of power in a proclamation "To Everybody!" "We place the Hungarian proletarian revolution under the protection of international socialism, but we are determined to defend it to the last drop of our blood against all attack . . . at the same time we express our readiness to conclude a peace as soon as possible which will ensure the conditions of existence of the working classes and make possible peaceful cooperation with every nation of the world and in the first place, with our neighbours."¹⁶

On March 30, Béla Kun told the *Neue Freie Presse*: "The government stands for peace. It wishes to be at peace with every nation of the globe . . . we do not insist on territorial integrity . . . Our relations with neutral countries continue to be good . . . We are organizing the Red Army with all the power at our disposal. The Red Army, however, has no aggressive intentions."¹⁷ In a reply note handed to General Smuts, the head of the Entente Mission¹⁸, which was signed by Sándor Garbai, the Chairman of the Revolutionary Governing Council, and Béla Kun, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, the following was said on the above questions: "We request that a conference, as suggested by us and as also proposed by General Smuts, be convened of the delegates of the Hungarian Republic of Councils, Bohemia, Rumania, Serbia and Yugoslavia, and German-Austria which parallel with the Paris Peace Conference would meet as soon as possible in Prague and not only establish the political frontiers, but also deal with all economic problems affecting the relationship between these countries. In this connection we wish to state most categorically that the Hungarian Republic of Councils does not base itself on the principle of territorial integrity, but it does oppose territorial arrangements based on imperialist conquest."¹⁹

This was a formulation of the insistence on the independence of Hungary and its right to self-determination as a nation, at the same time acknowledging the neighbouring states' right to national self-determination. They wanted to settle the conflicts between the Entente powers and Hungary in a peaceful way. Accordingly, the Governing Council recognized the military agreement concluded in

¹⁶ *Vörös Újság*, March 23, 1919.

¹⁷ *Vörös Újság*, March 30, 1919.

¹⁸ General Smuts' trip to Hungary was connected with the Anglo-American view that had temporarily gained ground at the Paris Peace Conference which thought it possible to liquidate the Republic of Councils by peaceful means. The proposal submitted by General Smuts was milder than that of the Vix note. The neutral belt was put a few kilometres farther east, the Rumanian advance was to be stopped and the blockade possibly ended. The possibility of inviting the representatives of the Republic of Councils to Paris before the Conference came to a decision on the Hungarian Peace Treaty was also indicated. The Hungarian government accepted the proposal suggesting only minor changes. (It asked that the border of the neutral zone be pushed back to the Maros River, in accordance with the agreement concluded by the Károlyi government in November 1918). Smuts, however, did not engage in further negotiations following the acceptance of the reply note. After his return to Paris, the Paris Conference decided in favour of armed intervention. Accordingly, the Rumanian Crown Council decided on April 10 to attack the Republic of Councils, and the attack itself actually started on April 16. Armed attack against the Republic of Councils by Czechoslovak troops also started at the end of April.

¹⁹ *Vörös Újság*, April 7, 1919.

Belgrade by the Károlyi government. This 18 point agreement was signed on November 13, 1918. It set the line of demarcation and accorded the Entente forces the right to occupy any one of the strategically important points in the country and to control the mails, the telephones and telegraph systems.

Once the April intervention started, the Governing Council was even prepared to make concessions which would have involved changes of personnel within the government. On April 30, 1919 Béla Kun informed United States President Wilson, on behalf of the Governing Council, that he had sent a note to the Czechoslovak, Rumanian and Yugoslav governments, unreservedly accepting their national and territorial claims. In exchange, Hungary demanded an immediate cessation of hostilities, non-interference in its internal affairs, protection of national minorities, unhindered transit-traffic, and the conclusion of economic treaties that accorded with the economic interests of all parties.²⁰ The Governing Council was willing to negotiate even as the forces of intervention were being pressed back, when the Red Army was counter-attacking, and the Northern campaign was having brilliant successes.²¹ The reason for this was the arrival of a telegram from Georges Clemenceau, the Prime Minister of France and Chairman of the Peace Conference, demanding that the Governing Council order the Hungarian armed forces to cease their war operations, at the same time offering to call the "representatives of the Hungarian Government to the Peace Conference." The Governing Council emphasized in its reply that it was not the troops of the Republic of Councils that had attacked the countries engaging in the war of intervention, and that it was not they who had broken the military convention of November 13. The Governing Council proposed that "in the interests of ending hostilities and implementing the provisions of the military convention of November 13, as well as settling related questions, furthermore, the temporary solution of economic problems . . . the states concerned delegate representatives to meet in Vienna without delay under the chairmanship of the representative of one of the Allied powers."²²

The desire for a peaceful solution was also apparent when, at the end of June, the party leadership and the Government, without weighing the consequences, withdrew the Red Army from Slovak areas, though the Rumanian forces had not withdrawn from the territories which the Entente had offered in exchange. This was done following another Clemenceau note.²³

²⁰ PI Archives, fond 138/8, pp. 28-30 (in German).

²¹ Units of the Hungarian Red Army started a counter-offensive on May 3, 1919 against the Rumanian and Czech bourgeois forces that had enjoyed initial successes. After it threw back the Rumanian Army, the Red Army liberated Salgótarján on the northern borders of the country, and then, on May 30, it started a counter-offensive over a 250 kilometer wide front. In the course of the triumphant northern campaign, units of the Red Army advanced 150 to 160 kilometers and liberated a large area, chiefly inhabited by Slovaks, that had been occupied by the Czech armies of intervention. In these liberated territories in Southern and Eastern Slovakia, workers' councils that had either already been or were being formed, seized power. A Slovak Republic of Councils was proclaimed in Eperjes on June 16, and a Revolutionary Governing Council was formed on June 20, with Antonin Janousek, the Czech socialist, as its Chairman.

²² *Vörös Újság*, June 10, 1919, (special edition).

²³ Clemenceau, in a note to the Revolutionary Governing Council on June 13, 1919, demanded that units of the Red Army be withdrawn from the territory of Czechoslovakia promising that the Rumanian armies would concurrently withdraw from the Trans-Tisza area. As later events showed, this note was purely a political trick.

The government of the Hungarian dictatorship of the proletariat, having done everything on its power to ensure peaceful coexistence with the neighbouring states, also raised the legitimate demand that the neighbouring states recognize the sovereignty of Hungary. However, as a result of the attack by the imperialist forces, this legitimate demand could only be realized in a war of national defence forced on the Republic of Councils. The defense of the country and of socialism thus became one and created an identical objective. The realization of the right to national self-determination thus depended on the successes of the Red Army, the level of military leadership and chiefly on developments in international power relations.

Military defence naturally primarily demanded a proper organization of the armed forces. The Revolutionary Governing Council called on the working class in the first place to come to the defence of the revolution. Workers' regiments were formed in Budapest of close to 13,000 workers from the large factories. By the middle of May, the army numbered more than 100,000 men. At the news of the interventionist attack not only men liable for military service but older ones, of 50 to 55 years of age, and the very young workers, began to pour into the barracks motivated by revolutionary fervour. Discipline in the forces was strengthened with each day, equipment and supplies improved and the fighting spirit of the troops was high.

Close to 10,000 internationalists also volunteered to join the Hungarian Red Army. Russian prisoners of war in Hungary formed a battalion of volunteers. A workers' detachment of 1,200 communists had come from Austria already in April, to take part in the defence of Soviet power. Their leader, Leo Rothziegel, and many of his comrades heroically sacrificed their lives in the cause of the Hungarian proletarian revolution. Thousands of workers and poor-peasants from Slovakia and the Carpathian Ruthenia joined the Red Army. Rumanian and Southern Slav volunteer units were formed, and German, Czech, Polish, Bulgarian, Italian and other nations' volunteers took part in the fighting. Their struggle in the military defence of the Republic of Councils and the international support to the revolutionary war of national defence was a magnificent manifestation of true proletarian internationalism.

The leaders of the Republic of Councils, while emphasizing the international character of the revolution, not infrequently also formulated the national and patriotic character of the war of national defence. A wireless message on March 23, addressed to the workers of the world in the German, English, French and Czech languages, declared Allied imperialism to be the chief cause of the victory of the revolution, since by "mutilating the territory of Hungary they tried and are still trying to deprive the country of all food supplies, industrial raw materials, and all the conditions of survival."²⁴ The correspondent of the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt* asked under what conditions the Republic of Councils was prepared to make peace. Béla Kun answered: "We are not at war with the Entente. However, if the Entente wants to make peace with us by the might of their swords, if they try to do to us what General Hoffmann did at Brest-Litovsk, if they seek to create the impression that they have not been fighting against militarism, but for their own militarist policy, then the war which will follow will not be like earlier wars, but the

²⁴ *Vörös Újság*, March 28, 1919.

fight of the oppressed against the oppressors, it will be like the American Revolution, when the whole nation took to arms against the British who tried to reduce them to the state of a colony to be fleeced."²⁵

The national character of the war of national defence and of the proletarian revolution nevertheless never gained prominence. This was also connected with the views on ending the conflicts between nations. Conflicts derived from class conflicts, and so they mechanically awaited their solution, from the victory of the proletarian revolution. The Republic of Council leaders considered it essential to fight against the nationalism of the newly founded bourgeois states, to dissociate themselves from the chauvinist attitudes of the old Hungarian ruling classes and to stress internationalism and the class-struggle character of the revolution and the war of national defence.

There is no doubt that the failure to emphasize properly the national character of the national liberation, of the revolutionary war in the country's defence produced certain difficulties and handicaps in home affairs above all, in winning over those sections of the populace who could not from one day to the other properly reconcile national feelings and internationalism. Nonetheless, it cannot be said that the propagandistic relegation of its national character to the background had a decisive effect on the attitude of those who fought in the revolutionary war in the country's defence.

When examining the history of the Republic of Councils the question naturally arises as to whether, at the time when the Czech armies of intervention were forced to retreat, and the Slovak Republic of Councils was proclaimed on June 16, the idea of restoring the historical Hungary of a nationalist character may not have arisen?

As for the first part of the question: the temporary constitution promulgated on April 2, 1919 referred to a federated Republic of Councils in Hungary.²⁶

Béla Kun in his address of May 15, which prepared the way for the party congress held on June 12, said:

"Our aim is an international Soviet Republic as a transitional form to the empire of socialism on an international basis."²⁷ In Hungary, he continued, now that the proletariat has achieved power, the national problem no longer exists. As regards the national question, however, the right to self-determination of the proletariat has to be declared. In a bourgeois state the right of self-determination of nations means the right to self-determination of the bourgeoisie, but since we belong to a former oppressor nation. "We have to have a most conciliatory attitude, to say nothing of rejecting the policy of territorial integrity, so as not to provide grounds for the bourgeoisie of any nation to cause confusion by claiming that the Hungarians are still chauvinists."²⁸

At the June party congress, in his explanatory remarks on presenting the party programme, Béla Kun once again emphasized: "We have to knock the grounds

²⁵ Kun, B.: *Válogatott írások és beszédek* (Selected Writings and Speeches), vol. 2, pp. 228–229, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1966.

²⁶ See *Tanácsköztársaság*, April 3, 1919. Order No. XXVI issued by the Revolutionary Governing Council. (MMTVd, vol. 6/a, pp. 100–101, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1959, compiled by Mrs. Sándor Gábor, Tibor Hajdu, and Gizella Szabó.)

²⁷ PI Archives, BM 1920–36–453 (5107). Shorthand notes.

²⁸ Loc. cit.

from under those national minority agitators who would gladly equate the Hungarian speaking proletariat with the Hungarian speaking bourgeoisie." Drawing attention to national sensibilities, he pointed out: "Besides, being supporters of a federated republic, we are working for a system of mutually allied republics of Councils, ensuring the utmost national and cultural autonomy, self-government and independence."²⁹

Article § 88 of the Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Councils of Hungary ran as follows: "The Socialist Federal Republic of Councils of Hungary is not opposed to the formation of separate Republics of Councils allied to the Hungarian Republic of Councils in liberated territories where there is necessary population and economic resources for this."³⁰

It follows from these statements of the leaders of the Republic of Councils that the principle of federation partly referred to alliances with national minorities in Hungary, and partly extended to the eventuality of nations in liberated areas wishing to be allied to the Republic of Councils.

The first interpretation did not truly signify a federation. The second, however, which already indicated a real federation, did neither precisely define what was meant by 'liberated territories', nor whether this interpretation exceeded the borders of historical Hungary. Therefore, from the remarks of Béla Kun in May and his statement that the Hungarian Republic of Councils would be pleased to form a federation with German-Austria in the event of a socialist revolution there, the conclusion can be drawn that Béla Kun and the leaders of the Republic of Councils did not think in terms of the historical Hungary. It ought to be noted here that the ideas and implementation of federation as regards the nations living within historical Hungary were in themselves a sound position which indicated adherence to Lenin's nationality policy. The fact that an independent Slovak Republic of Councils had been formed under the guidance of a separate Slovak Governing Council, is still not sufficient proof of this. However, proof that the Republic of Councils had not insisted on the principle of territorial integrity was inherent in the fact that no federation had been formed between the two Republics of Councils because the leaders of the Slovak Republic of Councils thought it more appropriate for a future Czechoslovak Republic to form a federation with Hungary and Ukrainian Russia.

Though the leaders of the Republic of Councils dealt with the national-nationality problem in an oversimplified way, their statements, and principles governing the nationality question reflected a sound theoretical approach. Béla Kun, as indicated, defined national self-determination as the self-determination of the bourgeoisie, and at the same time differentiated between capitalist and national oppression in nationality states. On June 10, for instance, referring to the Northern Campaign, he said that the Red Army was the bearer neither of imperialist nationalism nor national oppression, but of proletarian liberation, and liberation from every kind of national oppression. At the National Assembly of Councils, held between June 14 and 23, Dezső Bokányi, one of the leaders of the Republic of Councils, also spoke of ending this dual oppression.

²⁹ PI Archives, A.II. 14/45. Shorthand notes. (MMTVD, vol. 6/b, p. 18.)

³⁰ *Tanácsköztársaság*, June 28, 1919. The Constitution of the Socialist Federated Republic of Councils of Hungary. (MMTVD, vol. 6/b, p. 222.)

It would no doubt have been correct had the Republic of Councils at its inception declared itself for the right to self-determination of peoples and had come out sooner for the rights of national minorities. But the Constitution stipulated rights which were essentially already in practice. Article § 2 of the Temporary Constitution provided for every nation inhabiting a larger, contiguous territory, to form a separate national council and executive committee. This was equal to territorial autonomy. The complete equality of languages was assured at the same time as was the development of national education and culture. To this end the various nations could establish national councils which, and this was a correct stipulation, would not break up the territorial council organization (Constitution § 84). The language of the administration was to be that of the majority inhabiting the particular territory, but council bodies could also be addressed in minority languages. It became possible for a contiguous territory extending over several rural areas to be formed in a district and for a number of districts to form a national district.

The Republic of Councils established separate German and Ruthenian People's Commissariats with the right to issue decrees having the force of law. In terms of the Governing Councils' Regulation LXXVII of April 28, the German and Ruthenian national councils had jurisdiction over the national district councils, with the right of county councils, followed by rural district councils and finally village and urban councils. The Ruthenian National Council, for instance, had twenty representatives in the National Assembly of Councils. In spite of the fact that the Carpathian region was occupied by the Rumanian and Czech armies of intervention on May 5, a great deal was done for the rights of minorities in the short period available: The Ruthenian language came into general use, a decree on Ukrainian grammar was prepared, as well as textbooks in Ukrainian and Ruthenian, and a Ukrainian College was planned.

A few short months that the Republic of Councils lasted, a time of an uninterrupted war of self-defence, naturally proved insufficient for the national minority policy to fully unfold. In view of the highly complex conditions amidst which the dictatorship of the proletariat operated, and the fact that further progress depended on a proletarian revolution breaking out in other countries as well, it can be stated that all that had been done in the interests of solving the problem of national minorities is worthy of respect, from which the successors of the proletarian power can still draw highly instructive lessons.

On the Role of the Oppositionist Social-Democrat Leaders

A proper evaluation of the role played by the social-democrat leaders is perhaps the most complex chapter in the history of the Republic of Councils. It has to be said right at the start that not at any stage of the Republic of Councils was the social-democratic opposition able to exert a decisive influence on the masses. Contributing toward this was that some of the social-democrat leaders became communists, and that the majority of the social-democrat middle functionaries became loyal supporters of the Republic of Councils. Right up to the middle of June, positive elements were discernible in the activities of the former leadership of the Social Democratic Party as well, though not extending to all or of equal

degree. At the same time the implementation of a revolutionary proletarian policy was impeded by the wavering of some, the hostility of others, as well as by the efforts to restore bourgeois democracy. The degree and cause of hostility varied with the course of events, on many occasions the position of opposition leaders differed over one or another question.

At the time of the birth of the Republic of Councils and in the days of its peaceful development, the former leaders of the MSzDP supported and aided the proletarian power, with the exception of the trade union opposition group led by Károly Peyer and Gyula Peidl. Not only left-wing social democrats but also right-wing and centrist leaders, submitted a whole number of proposals that served the cause of the proletarian dictatorship. Their articles in newspapers rejected the old social democratic policies and called on the workers to line up on the side of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The wavering, and the liberal conception of the class struggle, more precisely, the demand for its practical application appeared early in April, following General Smuts' visit, when it became clear that the situation of the Republic of Councils had become insecure. The above-mentioned leaders of the MSzDP, however, unlike the right-wing social democrats active in the trade unions, did not at that stage unanimously support the attempts to restore bourgeois democracy in Hungary.

Following the start of the military intervention against the Republic of Councils, the centrist Zsigmond Kunfi and even the right-wing József Haubrich urged armed resistance. Others again, like Péter Agoston and Vilmos Böhm, as shown by their negotiations with the Entente agent in Hungary, and by their role in the April 26 Governing Council meeting, entertained ideas of capitulation, which, however, were not effectuated. Not much later, at the time of the May 1 crisis, the majority of the former social democratic centre and right wing supported capitulation.

On May 1 the Royal Rumanian Army reached the Tisza River front, French units occupied Makó and Hódmezővásárhely, two Hungarian towns close to the south-eastern border, and the Czech army occupied Sátoraljaujhely on the north-eastern border. Communication was established between the Czech and Rumanian armies of intervention. It was then that a number of right-wing and centrist members of the Governing Council, as well as several right-wing trade-union leaders proposed the resignation of the government. According to their proposal "... government power should be handed over to a directorium recruited from the ranks of the workers, which would retain all the economic and other measures of the proletarian dictatorship leading to socialism and shall deal with government affairs in the interim period, until the dictatorship of the proletariat is replaced by that of the bourgeoisie. During this period the means of the dictatorship of the proletariat are not to be employed."³¹ Vilmos Böhm, the commander of the Red Army supported the proposal to capitulate and immediately suspended active military operations. The Revolutionary Governing Council vested the right of decision with the proletariat. The representatives of the Budapest workers' organizations forced the advocates of capitulation to retreat. The question was finally decided by a resolution of the Central Workers and

³¹ PI Archives, fond 601. 1/17. Minutes of the May 2, 1919 meeting of the Revolutionary Governing Council.

Soldier's Council of Budapest which made it "incumbent upon every organized worker to defend by force of arms all those achievements which are the preconditions of the victory of socialism."³²

The revolutionary solution of the crisis influenced the opposition leaders as well, who retreated but did not relinquish their plans of capitulation. By early June the majority of centrist and right-wing social-democrat leaders found themselves on the road leading to a break with the communists and the proletarian revolution. They were then already engaged in a systematic struggle in the interest of replacing proletarian power by bourgeois democracy. The party congress scheduled for June 12 provided the opportunity to implement their aims, since a large part of the delegates, particularly the old trade union officials, were under their influence. This situation resulted from the fact that the party and the trade unions had not been separated at the time of the Republic of Councils.³³

There were two points on the agenda of the party congress, the party programme, and the amendment of the organizational rules of the party which was then followed by the election of the party leadership and the Control Commission. The deliberations were immediately marked by heated debate which broke out regarding the name of the party. The right wing proposed it be named the Hungarian Party of Socialist, or the Hungarian Party of Socialists (Communists), but the communists insisted on the Hungarian Party of Communists. In this connection a number of important differences of opinion on questions of policy and principle surfaced. Zsigmond Kunfi, for example, declared that he agreed with the party programme proposed by Béla Kun, but he rejected the revolutionary consistency which operated in the Bolshevik Party, since this was contrary to the Hungarian national character. An integrated programme of dictatorship cannot be implemented until the international revolution is sufficiently strong in a number of countries for the proletariat of those countries to stop the counter-revolution" he said. The dictatorship should be based on a traditional programme, which, while upholding the present decrees in all essentials, should operate with a policy of greater moderation, better adapted to actual conditions, stopping the development of the counter-revolution by well thought out decrees and not by terrorist means.³⁴

Kunfi's words draw attention to a very important issue, to the absence of world revolution, of a proletarian revolution on an international scale, and this once again prompted the social democrat leaders to urge the "moderation" of the dictatorship. There is no doubt that the consolidation of the socialist revolution in Hungary depended on the realization of the international revolution as well. But it does not in the least follow from this that the building of socialism had to be made exclusively contingent on the outbreak of proletarian revolutions in other countries. On the contrary, what was needed was the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat since the working class could only surmount internal contradictions in this way. As against this Kunfi demanded that the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie be dealt with in a humane manner, urging that those who consistently put the dictatorship into practice be punished. Simul-

³² *Népszava*, May 3, 1919.

³³ See Tibor Erényi's study in this volume on the relationship between the MSzDP and the trade unions.

³⁴ PI Archives, A.II.14/45. (MMTVD, vol. 6/b, p. 25.)

taneously, he argued against the centralism which was being increasingly asserted within the party, which he attributed to the mistake of the Russian revolution, with the intention of creating the organizational opportunity to freely proclaim the erroneous views of the social democrat leadership, which were contrary to the interests of the Republic of Councils.

The communists, however, together with the left-wing social-democrat leaders, rejected these retrogressive views. This showed that a number of the former MSzDP leaders had by this time developed into communists.

The congress accepted the party programme after a prolonged debate. The organizational rules based on reformist principles were removed from the agenda. They compromised over the name of the party, becoming the Hungarian Party of Socialist Communist Workers. The heated debate showed that the conflicts within the top leadership were unbridgeable. A formal split between the social democrats and communists had not yet occurred, but was already present in practice. This became clearly obvious when the party leadership was elected. The congress, by breaking the rules, removed the majority of the left wing from the leadership. When the communists refused to accept the election, Vilmos Böhm, Jakab Weltner and Zsigmond Kunfi threatened an armed coup, but József Haubrich, who was the leader of the Budapest workers' battalions refused to direct it. Following a compromise proposal by Jenő Landler the right wing finally agreed to hold a new election. This was a defeat for the right wing but did not bring complete victory to the revolutionary forces at the congress.

The congress was thus unable to create the necessary conditions for the welding together of a revolutionary party. It could not get that kind of revolutionary policy accepted which could have counterbalanced the efforts of the opposition, and thwarted their plans which would have prevented the realization of urgent tasks. This was due in part to the fact that the international situation had taken an unfavourable turn and this considerably effected the wavering social-democrat leaders. The fact that the communists overestimated the positive effect of May 2 on the social-democrat leaders also played a part. When it became clear that a number of the former social-democrat leaders had openly turned against the revolutionary policy, the necessary counter-measures were not taken. It is true that it would not have been particularly expedient for the communists to worsen the situation within the party precisely at the time of the intervention. However, those who had disgressed from the road of proletarian class struggle should nevertheless have been removed from the party leadership. The proletariat would have understood that the wavering leaders were defeating their own interest and self-sacrificing struggle when they declared against the war of national defence and for a bourgeois democracy.

The National Assembly of Councils, convened on June 14, 1919, immediately after the party congress, closed with the left wing forces gaining ground, though differences again occurred during the defence and foreign affairs debate. This was not only the result of the earlier compromise but also related to the fact that the right wing had less influence amongst the delegates to the Congress of Councils. Besides, it was not possible to discuss points of view hostile to the workers' councils with the delegates of these councils.

Though the right wing social democrats did not succeed in realizing their conceptions, their efforts were not ineffective. The unsuccessful Budapest military

coup in June³⁵ and the counter-revolution which broke out in the western part of the country was food for thought for some of the right wing leaders, but the effect soon wore off, and the previously mentioned Clemenceau note once again encouraged them to take a hostile attitude to the dictatorship. When the Entente did not fulfil its promise following the withdrawal of the Red Army from Slovakia at the end of June and the withdrawal of the Rumanian troops had not even begun, certain right-wing leaders once again tried to make use of the tense situation to implement the social democrats' concepts.

On July 5, at a conference of social-democrat leaders, Vilmos Böhm proposed a plan for overthrowing the Republic of Councils by a military dictatorship. The Entente representatives were informed about this plan through Otto Bauer of Austria. Haubrich, the commander of the Budapest workers' battalions now agreed with this plan, Jakab Weltner, however, convinced that the realization of bourgeois democracy was impossible under the given circumstances, and that a White Terror was sure to follow, rejected the proposal, and the plan was dropped.

For some time nothing was heard of anything like the July 5 plan. This was connected with the weakness of the social democrats' influence and with their fear of the openly counter-revolutionary forces. Defeatist propaganda, directed against the dictatorship of the proletariat, continued, however, and in fact increased.

At the end of July, open and extreme counter-revolutionary forces came forward with a plan to start an offensive against the Rumanian army.³⁶ Though the social-democrat leaders were unaware of Julier's intentions, after the Rumanian troops started an offensive on July 24 as a consequence of their superior strength and treason, and the proletarian revolution found itself in a serious situation, they once again took steps to implement their own ideas. The Soviet troops were no longer able to give the support they had at the May crisis when they had started an offensive along the Dniestr River causing the Rumanian General Staff to reconsider their plans.³⁷

³⁵ The counter-revolutionaries exploited the internal difficulties of the Republic of Councils to set the fuse of armed revolts throughout the country. A coup of a monarchist character took place in Budapest on June 24. Officers and cadets at Ludovika, the Military College, and three gun-boats of the Danube flotilla were the main force of the counter-revolutionary groups. The counter-revolutionaries occupied the telephone exchange and initiated armed actions at various points in the capital. The Security Forces of the People's Commissariat for Home Affairs, workers' battalions and detachments of the Red Guard put down the attempted coup within a few hours.

³⁶ Following the retreat from Slovakia, Ferenc Julier was appointed Chief of the General Staff. He represented the counter-revolutionary officers who served in the Red Army. Julier drew the conclusion from the failure of the counter-revolutionary coup that it would be impossible to put down the dictatorship of the proletariat with domestic counter-revolutionary forces. That is why he proposed the Tisza River offensive against the Rumanian armies, which led to the complete military debacle of the weakened Red Army.

³⁷ In the spring of 1919, Soviet Russia fought a life and death struggle with counter-revolutionary forces that had pounced on her from a number of directions. On May 1 and 2 when the situation of the Hungarian Republic of Councils was desperate, the governments of Soviet-Russia and Soviet-Ukraine sent an ultimatum to Rumania demanding the immediate evacuation of Bessarabia and the Bukovina. This played a significant role in prompting the Rumanian army of intervention to stop at the Tisza River, discontinuing their offensive against Budapest. The military situation of the Red Army became serious in June 1919. The Soviet government was forced to withdraw its troops from the western front and to concentrate all the forces of the Red Army in the Donietz basin. This made a link-up between the Hungarian and the Soviet Red Armies impossible.

Documents definitely show that the right-wing social-democrat leaders in any event wanted a change in power regardless of whether the Red Army had won successes or suffered defeats. On July 23, when the Red Army was still advancing, Vilmos Böhm, the Republic of Councils' Ambassador in Vienna, concluded an agreement to this effect in the course of negotiations with the Entente representatives.

The representatives of the Entente approved the plan to restore bourgeois democracy by means of a military dictatorship. Ernő Garami was proposed to head the new government. He was a well known leader of the MSzDP who had emigrated to Vienna at the time of the proclamation of the Republic of Councils. According to Vilmos Böhm's memoirs, their eight-point proposal contained the following:

"1. A dictatorial government shall take power. It would be desirable if the following were included in the government: Haubrich, Agoston and Garami. 2. Kun's communist government shall be removed. 3. The dictatorship shall only serve as the bridge to a government in which all classes will be represented. 4. All terrorist actions, confiscations and seizures shall cease immediately. 5. An Entente Council is to be invited to support the government. 6. The blockade will be lifted; the Entente will take immediate steps to ensure food stuffs and coal deliveries. 7. Every kind of political persecution shall cease. 8. The right of final decision in the question of socialization shall be left to the permanent government."³⁸

Though the proposal was accepted by Vilmos Böhm and by Jakab Weltner and Károly Peyer, who had gone to Vienna, the Entente powers were nevertheless unwilling to sanction it. They believed that the overthrow of the Republic of Councils could be accomplished not only on the basis of the social democratic conception. Thus they issued only a general statement leaving the way open to a choice of method, which, depending on later developments, would best suit their own interests. On August 1, following the resignation of the Revolutionary Governing Council, there was indeed a turn in events. This supports the conclusion that the idea of bringing about a bourgeois democracy with the help of the Entente was illusory in July as well. In Hungary, the situation was as follows: either the dictatorship of the proletariat will survive or an open counter-revolution will ensue. For that reason all those who in the June-July phase of the Republic of Councils wished to revert to October 1918 did not help but in fact harmed the interests of the working class and the progress of the nation. There is no doubt that the desire to stave off extreme reaction and the illusions regarding the Entente contributed to forming the views of the right-wing social democrats. Their self-deception was also related to their opposition to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Their views led them to the point where they did not want to recognize that circumstances were not favourable for bourgeois democracy. They did not draw their conclusions from the concrete historical situation but rather appraised the historical situation on the basis of their illusions.

The right-wing social democrats left out of consideration that there were no bourgeois democratic forces with whom to collaborate, nor did they take note of

³⁸ Böhm, V.: *Két forradalom tűzében* (In the Fire of Two Revolutions), pp. 445-446, Verlag für Kulturpolitik, Munich, 1923.

the fact that the support of the Entente did not provide any sort of guarantee. In unofficial discussions with the Entente representatives they could not even, for example, get them to promise to withdraw their support from the Szeged counter-revolutionaries, who had already formed a government under the aegis of the French.³⁹

The social-democrat leaders were not prepared to establish the military dictatorship by means of an armed coup. So they drew attention to the Rumanian advance and tried to force the Revolutionary Governing Council to resign by threatening that the Entente powers and Czechoslovakia would also attack.

The situation of the Republic on Councils became critical during the last days of July. Ferenc Julier, the Chief of Staff, was prepared to surrender and the right-wing social-democrat leaders urged the resignation of the Revolutionary Governing Council. The communists alone stood in favour of further resistance.

Just as on May 2, the mobilization of the masses was the prerequisite for the survival of the Republic of Councils. This required the joint decision of the Governing Council, the party leadership and the Budapest Central Workers' Council. Two views clashed on August 1, as they had on May 2.

A most heated debate ensued at the morning joint meeting of the Governing Council and the party leadership. The meeting started with an account of Böhm's report, which contained the proposal of the Entente representatives. Then Béla Kun spoke, proposing the raising of additional troops and the sending to the front of the 25,000 to 26,000 strong Fourth Army Corps. There was hope, he said, if the Budapest Central Soldiers' and Workers' Council was prepared to make sacrifices.⁴⁰ Dezső Bokányi, however, pointing out the exhaustion of the troops, declared that new efforts would only be useless sacrifice and opposed sending the 4th Army Corps to the front. Jakab Weltner's view was that the Rumanian army had to be stopped, but by the old army, which was already at the front. He was of the opinion that "sending help from Budapest is useless and also dangerous because the atmosphere is tense and we would lose Budapest if we sent out the forces we have here."⁴¹

Inasmuch as military resistance proved fruitless – and it was perfectly clear that the troops already at the front could not gain time to recuperate – then diplomacy was the only solution, he said, which meant a new system and a new government. Weltner's attitude, which falsified the objective truth, was rejected by Tibor Szamuely, the commander of the Security Forces of the People's Commissariat for Home Affairs, because the counter-revolutionary forces were weak, and the armed proletariat would have been able to ensure law and order. Szamuely proposed that the 4th Army Corps should not be sent to the front, but that the forces from Transdanubia and from the Tisza areas should be concentrated in

³⁹ On May 5, 1919, in Arad which was occupied by the French, a number of counter-revolutionary politicians of varying party affiliations formed a government led by Count Gyula Károlyi. They later moved to Szeged which was also occupied by the French. The activities of this government consisted of begging from the Entente politicians so as to obtain the necessary sums to finance the government, to organize a counter-revolutionary army, and to cover the expenses of representation. Miklós Horthy, later the leading figure of the counter-revolution, formerly the aide-de-camp to Emperor Francis Joseph, was Minister of Defense.

⁴⁰ PI Archives, fond 689. 1/3. Notes in Péter Ágoston's diary.

⁴¹ Loc. cit.

Budapest and that barricades be erected to defend the capital. Some of the communist leaders no longer found it possible to resist further. In this tense situation, one of the speakers, Béla Szántó, tried to influence the meeting to leave the decision up to the Workers' Council which met in the afternoon of the same day. By then the right wing was already threatening to incite the workers. Szántó's proposal was not acceptable to the right wing leaders since they feared a repetition of the events of May 2. In this extraordinarily tense atmosphere spoke Haubrich, who had left the meeting and returned with a report from military Headquarters: The 1st Red Regiment had left the front and was approaching Budapest, followed by the Sixth Army Corps. The Rumanian forces had reached a position five kilometers from Kálkapolna, the front was in a state of collapse and "it was not possible to discuss things for another minute, the Communist Government has to resign and allow power to be taken over by a government of social-democrat trade unionists."⁴²

The Governing Council then decided to resign. The right-wing leaders peacefully obtained power. The bourgeois democratic counter-revolution and external intervention had defeated the proletarian revolution, and brought to nought the proletarian dictatorship's 133 days of heroic effort.

The treason of the social-democrat right wing made it much easier for the open counter-revolution to seize power. The trade union government headed by Gyula Peidl, which had been formed on August 1, was soon easily overthrown on August 6, after having repealed the achievements of the Republic of Councils.

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The formation of the Republic of Councils was the greatest victory of the Hungarian working class' decades of struggle, an event of outstanding significance in the history of the international proletarian revolutionary movement. For the first time in Hungary's thousand year history the proletariat overthrow the power of the exploiting classes and brought its own power into being.

When the bourgeois system found itself in the deepest social and national crisis, it was the working class that showed the way out, that assumed political power and led the socialist revolution to victory. It is the great merit of the Hungarian communist movement and of the proletariat of the country that, making use of the opportunities provided by the revolutionary situation, it met its patriotic and international obligations, boldly seized political power and, fulfilling its historical mission, smoothed the way to a happier future for the whole nation, simultaneously advancing the cause of the international revolution as well.

With the birth of the Republic of Councils, Hungary was in the front-ranks of social progress. The establishment of the proletarian power ensured for the Hungarian nation the fraternal alliance of the socialist Soviet states and the sympathy of the international working class. The Hungarian Republic of Councils was the inspirer of the socialist world revolution in Europe and particularly in the Danube valley.

The Great October Socialist Revolution encouraged and helped the Hungarian proletarian revolution, it provided the example on how to overthrow the rule of the exploiting classes, create people's power and fight against the Entente inter-

⁴² Loc. cit.

vention. The existence and heroic struggle of the Hungarian Republic of Councils helped the fight of the Soviet nation; it reduced the opportunities of the Entente to throw new armies of intervention into the battle against Soviet Russia and the Soviet Ukraine.

The Republic of Councils rapidly built up the new people's power and with tremendous energy began the socialist transformation of society. The intervention created a serious situation for the proletarian state, it took away its most valuable forces from the work of construction, it made it more difficult to remove the hidden and open enemies of the dictatorship of the proletariat from the administration and it handicapped the development of the economy. The Republic of Councils nevertheless did work of inestimable value in this remarkably short time by creating a socialist system of production, raising cultural standards and providing social services. The creative talents and determination to which the construction and revolutionary national defence bore witness was shining proof of what working people are capable of when they create their own homeland under the leadership of the working class, and when they take the affairs of the country into their own hands.

The lessons, successes and errors of the Republic of Councils enriched the fighting experience of the international working class. They helped to unmask reformism and centralism more completely and contributed to the growth of the revolutionary wing of the working-class movement into an independent force and party. The traditions and fighting experience of the Republic of Councils above all enriched the Hungarian working-class movement and the Hungarian Party of Communists which was setting out to fight for a new socialist revolution.

The experience of 1919 offers convincing proof that, despite ideological differences, left-wing social democrats were the comrades-in-arms of the communists in the fight against reaction, for the political power of the working class, and in bringing the socialist revolution to victory. Joint revolutionary struggle enhances the development of both communists and left-wing socialists, helping the latter to become communists. The traditions of the Republic of Councils played a considerable role in the fact that the militant cooperation of communists and left-wing socialists remained a significant factor of the Hungarian working-class movement throughout the whole of the counter-revolutionary period. The memory of the Republic of Councils has been a continuing source of strength indelibly engraved in the memory of the Hungarian proletariat, strengthening its desire to achieve power once again. The dictatorship of the proletariat also survived in the memory of the masses of landless and poor peasants, as that power, which, for a time, had ended the domineering of estate owners and rich peasants, and did a great deal to improve the lot of the landless and poor. The Communist Party, on its part, drew the right conclusion from its errors in the agrarian question, making the distribution of land one of the chief demands of its new fighting programme.

The most beautiful pages of the history of the Communist Party tell of the Republic of Councils. The history of these 133 days belongs to those traditions of the struggles in Hungary's rich past of which we will always be proud, and which ensure for our people the love and sympathy of all progressive mankind. The creation and heroic struggle of the Republic of Councils is the most glorious chapter in the pre-Liberation history of the Hungarian nation.

The Hungarian Party of Communists on the Social Relationships of the Counter-Revolutionary Regime 1919-1933

by

Ágnes Szabó

The Hungarian Republic of Councils was overthrown on August 1, 1919 by superior military forces organized by the Entente.¹

Zoltán Rónai, Commissar for Home Affairs, reported the resignation of the Council government to those who attended the session of the Budapest Workers' and Soldiers' Council. He announced that in conformity with the agreement of the great powers – this referred to the talks between the Entente and the representatives of the Council government in late July 1919 – the new government had renounced the dictatorship of the proletariat and would return to the conditions obtained in the bourgeois-democratic revolution of 1918. Béla Kun, the real leader of the Republic of Councils, who was present at the session, warned that a bourgeoisie restored to power would be vindictive, and with the weapons of counter-revolution² would take revenge on the working class.

The so-called trade union government, its majority consisting of trade union leaders, took office on August 1. Its members began to function under the impression that the system of bourgeois democracy would be restored in Hungary. But after the defeat of two revolutions in Hungary, the social and political conditions for the realization of bourgeois democracy simply did not exist. The restoration of capitalist relations did not favour the establishment of a bourgeois democratic system, but rather opened the way to the counter-revolutionary forces, and through them, to those classes which had held power in the Austro-Hungarian empire, in the era of dualism. During its six day existence every measure taken by the trade union government, which had practically no influence in bourgeois circles, weakened the working class, whose mass force could have supported the political concepts of the government. On the sixth day, following the resignation of the Council government, the political exponents of counter-revolution assumed power.

The formation of the Friedrich government, which expressed the interests of the various counter-revolutionary groups, but which was essentially monarchist, ushered in the period which is known in Hungarian history as the twenty-five years of counter-revolutionary Horthy fascism.

The stabilization of the Hungarian counter-revolutionary regime did not proceed smoothly. The ruling classes, returning to the capitalist system of production

¹ See Béla Kirschner's study in this volume.

² The White Terror took the lives of 5,000 people. There are over a hundred common graves of the victims of group massacres. The number of imprisoned or detained was about 70,000 and a further 100,000 people emigrated for political or economic reasons.

and resuming their political "rights", endeavoured first of all to prevent any kind of social progress. They abhorred the dictatorship of the proletariat but their hatred of bourgeois democracy was no less intense, for it had prepared the soil for the Republic of Councils. Their original goal was to return of pre-1918 social conditions. However, the conditions for this could not be created simply by restoring capitalist production relations. To conjure back the conditions prior to the victory of the bourgeois-democratic revolution of October 31, 1918, to return to the relations which existed at the time of the dualist system hardly differed from the illusions the "trade union" government had regarding the realization of a bourgeois-democratic republic.

The political and economic system characterizing the era of dualism came to an end with the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Hungarian society was shaken by their defeat in the war, and then by two revolutions, while the assumption of power by the counter-revolution was accomplished within the framework of the new national borders approved by the Treaty of Trianon in June 1920. The reduced territory of the country, the resultant changes in economic structure and the factor of social conscience all indicated that it was impossible to simply resume socio-economic and political life from where it had been interrupted in the "happy years of peace."

The "happy years of peace" were over, and not only in Hungary. The Hungarian capitalist restoration had also to take into account the changed European political power relations. But its problems were far more serious than that, they were more profound. The historical storms which swept over Europe not only endangered the Hungarian ruling regime, but also shook capitalism throughout the world. With the victory of the proletarian revolution in Russia a new era began, the era of the general crisis of the capitalist system. At this time there occurred a regrouping of class interests, and of power positions in the relations between the social strata. From this time on greater efforts were made to win the masses than ever before. The world-wide class struggle continued in extremely keen forms. Greater importance was attached to the counter-revolutionary groupings than before in their opposition to the revolutionary forces of society, particularly to the proletariat.

In the course of the capitalist restoration in Hungary, the landlords regained their estates, the finance capitalists their factories, industrial establishments and banks, while the middle strata of the bourgeoisie regained their private undertakings, workshops and stores. It was more difficult for the ruling classes to achieve political restoration than to restore capitalist production relations. The large landowners and finance capitalists alike claimed the right to power. These ruling classes were willing to maintain the class alliance that existed during the era of dualism. But the changes which were taking place in the life of the country revived the earlier contradictions of the alliance. New contradictions were added to the old, and as a result, the contradictions within the ruling class became sharper than they had ever been. As the land-owning class lost part of its estates and with it a large part of the markets for its produce, its loss in political weight corresponded to the reduction of its economic strength. And while finance capital was freed from its Austrian competitors, it had to establish power under conditions of war impoverishment, of changes brought about by the socialist economic policy of the Republic of Councils, and the economic disruptions caused by the Treaty of

Trianon. The weight of industry rose in the territorially smaller country. Economic consolidation enhanced its importance. In keeping with this, the industrial bourgeoisie tried to increase its political influence.

The third strata, which made its appearance in the traditional alliance of the ruling classes, was composed of the gentry, military officers and state officials who had played an active role in overthrowing the Republic of Councils. This strata provided the military force for capitalist restoration. In the first months of the restoration of the capitalist system it was already obvious that they were indispensable to the counter-revolutionary regime not only in gaining power but in maintaining it as well. This strata, which consisted mostly of members of the landowner class, sought to use its anti-revolutionary position to expand its political and economic power. With regard to political and governing methods it was more drastically counter-revolutionary than the traditional ruling classes; it became the major exponent of a new form of political reaction, fascism.

In this way the struggle for the consolidation of the capitalist restoration was conducted not only against the proletariat and other working classes and strata, but it was waged amidst an internal battle between the Hungarian ruling classes as well. The intricacies of this struggle were further complicated by the fact that the urban petty-bourgeoisie and the landowning peasants were also drawn into the struggle against social progress. Immediately following the overthrow of the Republic of Councils the latter groups became particularly active and, by obtaining representation in parliament and the government, they made significant political progress. Therefore, one of the central problems in the consolidation of the Hungarian counter-revolutionary regime was how to stabilize the power of the large landowner class and the finance bourgeoisie in such a way that the middle strata which had played so great a role in bringing the counter-revolution to power be maintained as the social base of the regime, while breaking down their independent political strivings.

This is why the way from the restoration of capitalism to the consolidation of the counter-revolutionary regime was interrupted by a series of political crises. It was in about the mid-1920s that those characteristics of the whole Hungarian counter-revolutionary dictatorship which endured throughout the entire period of Horthy fascism, took final form. While attempts had been made to change or modify them to some extent, the dominant features of the regime remained essentially intact until 1944 when Hungary was occupied by the German fascists.

Historical works have dealt at length with defining the nature of the counter-revolutionary regime. Certain circles of the Hungarian ruling classes willingly and proudly emphasized that Hungary was the cradle of fascism. The Hungarian counter-revolutionary regime contained many features, particularly in the period of its formation, similar to the fascist dictatorships of other countries. However, in its twenty five years existence, a special combination of open and concealed dictatorship can be noted. In 1921 total, open dictatorship was replaced by a more "presentable" counter-revolutionary dictatorship which would be acceptable to the western democracies, be more likely to win and mislead the masses, maintaining a semblance of civil rights and a sham parliament. In the class alliance between the large landowners and the finance capitalists, joined by the military officer-state official strata as the third partner, the leading role was gradually taken over by finance capital, but political personalities of the large landowner

class occupied the leading posts in political life. The parliamentary system provided the constitutional framework for the compromise among the ruling classes and also granted limited rights to other groups of the bourgeoisie, to the middle strata and petty-bourgeoisie, and, in fact, even to the working class. The reactionary electoral system³ ensured the current leading party of the ruling classes with an absolute majority in parliament.

While there were a number of political parties during the period of Horthy fascism, leadership in parliament, in the state apparatus and in public administration was in the hands of the government party. Besides the bourgeois liberal opposition and the legal party of the working class, the Social Democratic Party of Hungary (MSzDP), a role was played in parliament and, in fact, in the entire political life of the Horthy period by the right-wing opposition. These racist and other extreme right-wing parties protested the "liberalism" of the regime. Their secret political organizations permeated public life and the entire apparatus of the system, putting pressure on it, while at the same time supporting it. They repeatedly endeavoured to introduce open, total fascism in Hungary.

The regime developed gradually, and although until 1944 its main features did not change, modifications were introduced by the different governments as a result of certain domestic and foreign political events.

The course of these developments and the changes were carefully observed and fully analyzed by the Hungarian Party of Communists (KMP).

During the twenty-five years of Horthy fascism the KMP worked under strict illegality. It was a political party which could not state its views openly, could not express its opinion freely, and could not organize without punishment. And although it seemingly played no role in political life, it nevertheless had a definite influence on it.

The KMP was driven underground by the White terror immediately following the overthrow of the Republic of Councils. This state of affairs was sanctified by Article III, 1921.⁴ It is well-known that during the time of the Republic of Councils the Communist Party merged with the Social Democratic Party and following the defeat of the proletarian power, the two working-class parties again separated. The MSzDP was re-established at its party conference, held on August 24, 1919. The reorganization of the Communist Party, which had suffered heavy losses, was a long process. The reorganization was accompanied by very lively

³ The first decree of the counter-revolution on suffrage was Decree no. 5958 ME, 1919 of the Friedrich government. The voting age was set at twenty-four years for men and women. For women it provided the additional condition of literacy. Universal, secret suffrage, won during the revolution, was retained. The right to vote was considerably restricted, in comparison to the Friedrich government, by decree no. 2200 ME, 1922 of the Bethlen government, which raised the voting age for women to thirty years, required four years of primary schooling for men, six years for women, two years of residence in the same area. It deprived those sentenced for activities during the Republic of Councils of the right to vote for five to ten years. With the exception of Budapest, and several rural towns, this decree re-instituted voting by open ballot. This decree was sanctified by Act 1925: XXVI. tc. The right to secret ballot was again introduced in Act 1938: XIX, but contained further restrictions as to voting age and schooling. Six years of primary schooling were required for men. Women could vote at the age of thirty, if they had six years of primary school and at least three children.

⁴ Article III, 1921 on the "more effective protection of state and social order" was approved by the National Assembly on March 16, 1921. Under the law, strict sanctions were to be applied not only against those who carried out communist activities but also against those who knew of any communist organizing and did not report this to the authorities.

theoretical activity and an important part of this was the examination of Hungary's political and social relations. This theoretical work cannot be separated from the political struggle and from the process which led to the re-establishment of the KMP. The theoretical work of the Hungarian communists in analyzing society reflects well the ideological development of the Hungarian communists during the more than two decades of illegality and also the many phases in the theoretical development of the international communist movement.

The Hungarian communists began their analysis of conditions in Hungary practically on the day following the defeat of the Republic of Councils. Their forums were the international communist press, and the communist newspapers prepared in emigration and illegally in Hungary. Their views live on in studies, independent volumes, and in reports and notes which were sent to the Communist International. In every detail, event by event, they put Hungarian society and all events taking place in Hungary under the magnifying glass of Marxism-Leninism. However, it was only at different official meetings, at party conferences or congresses that their analyses could be compiled into a comprehensive social study of society, including all of its classes and strata. They turned their attention to the struggles of the classes, strata, and political groups just as they did to the basic questions of society to the contradiction between labour and capital.

The Hungarian Party of Communists on the Open Counter-Revolutionary Dictatorship and the Consolidation 1919-1922

The essence of the major social, political and economic trends in the year and a half following the overthrow of the Republic of Councils were described on August 7 by the communists when they concluded that "Hungary today is ruled by the naked dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, unconcealed for it is drunk with its own victory and does not feel the need to modestly hide behind the kinds of phrases capitalists of other countries use".⁵

The Hungarian communists brought the bloodbaths and destruction of the counter-revolutionary forces to international public attention. They did not limit themselves to simply listing the facts, but they also examined the social causes behind the bloody terror. They rightly concluded that the personifiers of the White Terror, the special troops of Miklós Horthy, and later the so-called "National Army" were the only organized force which could ensure the successful execution of the capitalist restoration. Their pamphlets and newspaper articles were justified in stressing that these military forces "were needed by the masters of capital just as by the masters of the land".

They were justified in doubting the success of those efforts made in autumn 1919 by the Entente, first of all by the British envoy, Sir George Russel Clerk, to convince Horthy to come to agreement with the representatives of the political parties of the various bourgeois groups and the MSzDP to establish a relatively consolidated power. The communists saw clearly that any endeavour aimed at

⁵ "Der weisse Terror in Ungarn", *Die Rote Fahne*, Vienna, August 7, 1919.

creating a "stable bourgeois class rule" in Hungary under the given circumstances was doomed to failure. They were led to this conclusion not only by the fact that they saw no other real force than Horthy and his commandos, but also by the experiences that the strongest striving of the ruling classes was to take revenge on the working classes.

The events in Hungary and the complicated tasks of reorganizing the party equally demanded that the Hungarian communists exposed not only the subjective factors, the vindictiveness of the ruling classes, but also the true forces behind events in Hungary, the objective class power relations. The historical question of the autumn of 1919 and early 1920, was: who are the true rulers, who make up the real body of government in Hungary? It was not easy to answer this question. The large landowners and the finance capitalists, in whose interests the struggle was actually being waged so as to reestablish their power, were not in the forefront of political life, they were not the leaders of the government. Representatives of the middle strata were in the government. However, true political power was not in the hands of the government but in that of the national army.

The composition and activities of the national army in the areas under its control gave rise to the view, which in late 1919 and early 1920 dominated among the communists, that Hungary was in fact ruled by a military dictatorship backed by the large landowner class. "The military dictatorship would like to smother all freedom of speech . . . Power is again in the hands of the feudal agrarian lords, who have no other choice but to reestablish their lost power in a kingdom, to be set up under the protection of the white troops. This fact is not changed by the "representatives" of the bourgeoisie and peasants in the new government. The bourgeoisie has learned nothing and forgotten everything. And at least today, they are ready, out of fear and cowardice, to be the bootlickers of the most extreme reactionary clique."⁶

As a result of changing events, by the spring of 1921 three views had developed among Hungarian communists regarding the class content of the Hungarian counter-revolutionary regime.

1. That the Hungarian counter-revolutionary regime was a military rule standing above classes;
2. That actual power was in the hands of the bourgeoisie;
3. That the large landowners and finance capitalists were behind the commandos, and that the political and economic consolidation was in their interests. This latter view became predominant within the Communist Party from early 1921 on.

What was this analysis built on? The commandos, the so-called Szeged-group⁷ operating under Miklós Horthy's banner were not only the actual political power of the counter-revolution but the expression of the independent political concepts of the gentry too.

What was involved here was not only that Transdanubia, where the National

⁶ *Die Rote Fahne*, Vienna, November 18, 1919.

⁷ This was the name of the counter-revolutionary groups organized during the period of the Republic of Councils, in the summer of 1919, under the protection of the counter-revolutionary government located in Szeged, then under French occupation.

Army had moved from Szeged and where it had its headquarters in the autumn of 1919, presented the visage of military dictatorship, but rather that the programme of the "Szeged group" incorporated the concepts for autonomy of the gentry-military officer and state-official strata. The essence of this was radical rightism, extreme nationalism, anti-semitism, some kind of demagogic "anti-capitalist" demand, a sort of "land distribution" and the restriction of finance capital that was under Jewish control.

However, the attention of the communists was drawn to the officers detachment commandos not only because of their role in Hungary's domestic life. In the class struggle waged on an international scale the Hungarian revolutionary forces were practically the first to be faced by those counter-revolutionary storm troops which had appeared simultaneously in other countries and, enjoying the secret or open financial support of the capitalists, they protected capitalism from the revolutionary efforts of the proletariat. By disclosing them the Hungarian communists called attention to a factor of international political life which was moving gradually to the forefront and requiring increasing attention.

In fact, storm troops opposed to revolution appeared⁸ in just about every European country. Generally, the staff of the storm troops was composed of the impoverished section of the large landowner class, of professional soldiers and of those formerly engaged in public administration. However, the counter-revolutionary units participating in street fighting and in armed conflict were the sons of the middle and petty-bourgeois strata who were becoming impoverished and losing their means of livelihood. The storm troops were activated particularly in those countries where the changes following World War I disrupted the former equilibrium of society, where capitalism was endangered by working-class movements, but where the symptoms of capitalist disintegration first struck the declassed strata. This was the case in Germany, Austria, Italy and in Hungary as well. It was precisely for this reason that the conclusions drawn by the communists as to the composition and function of the "National Army" applied also to the storm troops of other countries, and helped the Left to evaluate them politically.

The Hungarian communists concluded that the strata, which formed the majority of the "National Army", is identical with the social strata which held the majority of the posts in the army and public administration in pre-war Hungary, and following the defeat were left without positions because of the country's reduced territory. The communists regarded the leaders of this strata as the active officers whose material and social wellbeing was closely linked to the oppressive state machinery. This active officer strata was supplemented with elements recruited from the petty-bourgeoisie, who are frequently referred to as "students" in communist literature. These were groups of reserve officers or junior officers who went to the front almost while still in their childhood. After they were discharged they found it nearly impossible to find employment in the greatly deteriorated Hungarian economic life.

While examining the class contradictions of the counter-revolutionary regime, the competition to gain power and the activities of the commandos which were ostensibly above the individual classes, the Hungarian communists raised the

⁸ Nolte, E.: *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche*, Piper, Munich, 1963.

question as to whether the political reaction established in Hungary might not be a form of Bonapartism.

From where did this evaluation of the Hungarian Party of Communists originate? First of all, from historical analogy. They viewed the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and the contradictions between the ruling classes as a historical repetition of the France of 1848. They maintained that "Each time class struggles in bourgeois society become sharp, be it between the various strata of the bourgeoisie, or between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, so that social order can only be maintained by force, the rule of armed force is established, putting an adventurer at the head of an adventurist army which then uses force to enforce class 'peace'".⁹

In the demagogic proclamation by the Hungarian counter-revolution of "Christian national unity", which was the slogan first adapted by the "National Army", they also saw features identical to the 1848 counter-revolution and Bonapartism. "They had 'saved' society from 'the enemies of society'. They had given out the watchwords of the old society, 'property, family, religion, order', to their army as passwords and had proclaimed to the counter-revolutionary crusaders 'In this sign thou shalt conquer!'"¹⁰

This analogy, even though not precise, cannot be considered as a rigid and un-historical comparison. The idea is in part justified by the fact that at that time Bonapartism was a new form of political reaction against the revolutionary movements. In essence, the Hungarian counter-revolutionary regime was a new type of political reaction in the twentieth century: fascism. Fascism was born of the general crisis of capitalism and was aimed at stifling the revolutionary movements, and thus prevent them from spreading. But while the Bonapartist state was in reality based on a certain equilibrium of classes, the fascist dictatorship is the dictatorship of finance capital. It is, however, a historical fact that at the time when fascist dictatorships made their appearance there was certain instability among the different classes. This feature was particularly characteristic of conditions in Hungary between 1919 and 1921.

The fascist dictatorship, as a form of state power, was only subjected to examination following the *Marcia su Roma*, Mussolini's advent to power in Italy in 1922. The term came into common usage in Hungary and international life only in the latter half of the 1920s. Nevertheless, we consider the evaluation by the Hungarian Party of Communists pertaining to Hungarian power relations as the first recognition of the actual nature of the new type of political reaction which appeared following World War I.

Now let us examine the second view which had developed in communist circles. This view held that the counter-revolutionary regime in Hungary was not a military dictatorship but a form of petty-bourgeois rule which the large landowners and finance capitalists were trying to drive back. Events in Hungarian political life also helped to feed this view. The parliamentary elections of January 1920 re-

⁹ "Reálpolitika az ellenforradalom ellen" (Real-politik against the Counter-Revolution), *Proletár*, November 11, 1920.

¹⁰ Marx, K.: *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, p. 25, International Publishers, New York, 1963.

sulted in a significant victory for the Small Holder's Party¹¹. The Small Holder's Party received 91 of the 218 parliamentary mandates and with that it became the largest party in the National Assembly. In 1920 the petty-bourgeois peasant forces played a significant role in Hungarian political life and they spoke of realizing independent peasant aims, first of all, the land reform¹² which was the unanimous desire of the Hungarian peasantry. The other largest party was the Christian National Union Party, in which, alongside the large owner class, certain middle bourgeois strata were also represented.¹³

In opposition to the other parties, these two parties formed the so-called Christian bloc. Within the Christian bloc the fight was between the petty-bourgeois-peasant and large landowner groups. This conflict was wittily described by the communist press: "... the small holders cannot allow themselves to be oppressed, and this too flows from their class position. The small holder and big landowner classes, in political unity, are forced to struggle against one another."¹⁴

The conflict between the small holders and the big landowners came to the surface in the summer of 1920 during the debate on the draft law for the land reform. The large owner group within the Small Holder's Party, led by Gyula Rubinek, an agrarian politician and the Minister for Agriculture between August 1919 and August 1920, prepared the draft law to be presented to parliament. This draft clearly protected the interest of the big landowners, and provided for a minimum of land distribution, but only following compensation by the state. The counterproposal of Nagyatádi protected the interests of the landowning peasantry, and wished to "burden" the big landowners with a distribution of land on a much broader scale. He could not put across the ideas in his proposal. The draft law on the land reform prepared by Rubinek was approved. What happened to the land reform after that bore out the conclusion of the communists: "The proposed Nagyatádi Szabó-Rubinek type of land reform, is not a land reform, but a sham, which had been promised but cannot be carried out under present day class and production relations."¹⁵

The contents of the land reform and the manner of its approval already indicated that changes were taking place in Hungarian political life, and that power

¹¹ The party of the landowning peasantry. It was under the leadership of István Nagyatádi Szabó, a wealthy peasant of Transdanubia. It was formed in January 1919, and after the counter-revolution came to power in November 1919, it united with the Agrarian Party, the common party of the rich peasantry and landowners. The peasant elements in its leadership were gradually pushed into the background. In 1922 the united party of the counter-revolutionary regime was formed from its ranks but by this time the large landowners played the leading role in it.

¹² In Hungary the break-down of land ownership relations – the large number of landless peasants or owners of dwarf plots in contrast to the small number of large landowners – made the distribution of land a central social issue. After the incorrect agrarian policy of the Hungarian Republic of Councils – the postponement of the land reform – various counter-revolutionary parties, first of all the party of the peasantry, concerned themselves with the question of changing land ownership relations by distributing land.

¹³ The Christian National Union Party was founded in September 1919 by amalgamating the Christian National Party and the Christian Socialist Economic Party. It was an alliance of groups representing various political shades of the ruling classes, but all were counter-revolutionary.

¹⁴ "Kisgazdák. Nagygazdák" (Small Holders. Large Holders), *Die Rote Fahne*, Vienna; *Vörös Újság*, supplement to *Die Rote Fahne*, February 8, 1920.

¹⁵ Lengyel, Gy.: "Földbirtokreform" (Land Reform), *Proletár*, September 2, 1920.

relations were shifting in the direction of the power positions and political influence of the large landowners and finance capitalists. The change was also reflected in the composition of the government. The colourless Sándor Simonyi Semadam was replaced as Prime Minister by Count Pál Teleki. All indications were that the signing of the Treaty of Trianon would be followed by the political consolidation of the country's counter-revolutionary character.

The efforts of the large landowners and big capitalists to consolidate their power were accompanied by the most reactionary laws in the history of Hungarian law-making; the introduction of corporal punishment, the *numerus clausus*, (restricted admission, primarily of Jews, to universities) the broadening of the head of state's authority while narrowing the jurisdiction of Parliament, followed by the already mentioned Article III, 1921 which legalized the suppression of the progressive movement, first of all, of the revolutionary branch of the working-class movement.

The Hungarian communists had reservations regarding to possibilities of the Hungarian ruling classes to achieve consolidation. Their disbelief was not primarily due to the undoubtedly still quite unstable Hungarian domestic political situation, but to the hopes which at that time the Hungarian communists still had in the world-wide advance of the revolution.

The Hungarian counter-revolutionary regime tried to function at a time when the international struggle between the socialist and capitalist forces had by no means been decided. The analysis of the Hungarian situation and the conclusions drawn from this prompted the communists to regard the situation in Hungary as a transitional one. The analytical articles of the Hungarian communists always arrived at the conclusion that the struggle for power of the Hungarian ruling classes and in their internal crises would finally be "resolved" by an internationally victorious proletarian revolution. The Hungarian communists believed in world revolution, first of all in the victory of the revolutionary forces in Germany. They were of the opinion that the change in international class relations would create favourable conditions for the Hungarian revolutionary working class which would enable them to take up the struggle for a second Republic of Council with renewed force following their serious defeats during the White Terror.

The almost Messianic belief in the victory of the world revolution resulted, by the latter half of the 1920s, in a certain gap between the evaluation of the communists and real conditions in Hungary. György Lukács, while exposing the true contradictions in the process of consolidation drew, in an article entitled "A konszolidáció kísérlete" (Experiment in Consolidation), the conclusion that "... in the foreseeable future consolidation will remain a pious wish, and the Entente hopes in vain that with the forced ratification of the peace treaty it can advance both objectives, by disarming a considerable part of the white army. Everyone knows (the white army most of all) that nothing can nor will come of this. If the German whites can remain armed amidst a revolution which has not been defeated, and in fact is on the rise, why should not Horthy be as successful. Friedrich has allegedly already gone to Munich to study the *Orgesch*, (a German counter-revolutionary terrorist organization). But with or without it, either in keeping with the German pattern or in an original national form, the white army will be maintained. And with that all 'grand politics' from Millerand to Apponyi have

been defeated, everyone will be helpless in the face of the Prónay¹⁶ clique. Until they are exterminated – and this can be done only by the proletariat in the course of the world revolution – there can be no 'order' in Hungary."¹⁷ The article does not reckon with the possibility of political compromise. Lukács could imagine only a drastic solution. He did not consider possible such an agreement between Horthy and the Hungarian ruling classes which would aid consolidation.

Several weeks later the columns of *Proletár* gave space to such views which expressed the belief that consolidation was possible after all. It is true that in the meantime events in international political life also affected some sort of equalization of forces. Even if western capitalists were not completely reconciled to the existence of Soviet Russia – the war of intervention was still in progress in the Far East – they did take note of and reckoned with it. They were much more inclined to block the road to the advance of the revolution in Europe with the aid of the Versailles peace system than with a war of intervention. This was also born out by the preliminary Polish-Russian peace treaty talks in Autumn 1920. At this time the Hungarian communists began to study the international interrelations of consolidation in Hungary. "Therefore, the Entente wants consolidation in Hungary. It wants to support those elements of the Hungarian counter-revolution who also want consolidation in their own interests: the end to the rule of the commandos, and the degradation of the army from their position of exclusive power to that of one of the common, dependent bodies of the bourgeois state. The Entente is now uncomfortable with these 'extremist' elements of the White Terror and they therefore extend their hands to those elements of the White Terror who have been uncomfortable with these 'extremists' for a long time now".¹⁸

In contrast to the previously quoted study, it is now considered possible to liquidate the officers' commandos. It weighs the prospect of consolidation. Interestingly enough, however, it awaited the possible establishment of order not from the bourgeoisie – the traditional ruling classes – but from the landed peasantry. Therefore, the second concept which had been relegated to the background by the end of 1920, was revived in the communists' analyses. The reason for the temporary revival was that the study was written at the time when the realization of the political plans of the group of the large landowners gathering around Bethlen and Teleki was delayed and a united political party of the ruling classes could not yet be formed.¹⁹ About the same time as the article was published the first Teleki administration (July 19 – December 21, 1920) resigned. There ensued a temporary period of uncertainty in political life and the signs of crisis appeared. The expected appointment of István Bethlen did not take place.

In this complex situation the communists did not immediately recognize all the factors which advanced and obstructed the realization of consolidation, the in-

¹⁶ Pál Prónay, landowner, one of the officer commando leaders of the Szeged group, an infamously blood-thirsty unit of the counter-revolutionary forces.

¹⁷ *Proletár*, November 4, 1920. Also published in Lukács, Gy.: *History and Class Consciousness*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1971.

¹⁸ "Rend és ellenforradalom" ("Order" and Counter-Revolution), *Proletár*, December 4, 1920.

¹⁹ The formation of a united government party was delayed by the fact that at that time the KGP which had the parliamentary majority was still firmly demanding the reform of public administration and the implementation of the land reform act. The group of István Bethlen was still not sufficiently strong to repel these efforts.

teraction of cause and effect. Time was needed for the factors influencing the course of consolidation to make their open appearance in political life. And even more time and facts were required for the communists to draw correct conclusions from a political situation that practically changed daily. Therefore, the quoted studies, which are quite interesting on many issues of detail, continued to reflect the communist conviction that the situation in Hungary was unfavourable to the consolidation of the counter-revolution.

Following this view taken in the articles, the reception given by the Hungarian communists to the appointment of István Bethlen as Prime Minister was particularly valuable and significant as far as the future of Hungary was concerned.

The first Bethlen government was formed on April 14, 1921. On May 5 the *Proletár* wrote: "The Bethlen administration is a turning point in the Hungarian counter-revolution".²⁰ This immediate reaction was followed by several analyses all of which examined the 'new quality' brought by Bethlen into political public life. They analyzed his "moderate liberalism" and those endeavours in Bethlen's policy which indicated that the Prime Minister was following in the footsteps of István Tisza, the Hungarian Prime Minister of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in a policy of representing the class alliance of the large landowners and the finance capitalists.²¹ They correctly recognized the relationship between the Bethlen administration and the large landowner class, while they also saw him as the political exponent of finance capital. "There is only one kind of capitalism, finance capitalism. The rule of bank capital. Hungarian imperialism has been defeated. The country has been whittled down, and put at the mercy of the victors... But this does not mean that Hungarian finance capitalism will relinquish its political and economic power in Hungary," wrote *Proletár*. "It must continue to advance at all costs. The defeat of Hungarian imperialism is a crisis which it is endeavouring to overcome with the aid of even greater centralization and concentration. In other words, the circle of the masters of bank capital is becoming still narrower, while even larger bank trusts, cartels and syndicates are being formed. They are trying to create their own "legal order" and will allow no interference from any other class. This then would be the consolidation."²²

Despite the Communist Party's declaration about the importance of the formation of the Bethlen government, and the recognition of the manoeuvrings and duplicity of the Bethlen consolidation, there continued to live on in the ranks of the KMP the opinion that Bethlen would also not succeed in the political and economic consolidation of Hungarian society which was pregnant with very sharp contradictions. The Hungarian communists no doubt continued to expect a turn in international events which would be favourable to the class struggle but certain Hungarian domestic political events gave rise to the hope that the regime might

enter a new crisis. Such domestic political events were: the experiments in the spring and autumn of 1921 by Karl Habsburg to restore the kingdom²³, the failure of the experiment to achieve financial stability, the resignation of the Minister for Finance, Loránd Hegedüs, in late 1921, and the procrastination in early 1922 which delayed the establishment of a united government party.²⁴

In this period, however, the defensive manoeuvres of international capital in different countries was superseded by an attack on the revolutionary workers' movements. They were not unsuccessful either, and the prospects for the advance of the revolution were reduced in Europe. The change in relation of class forces made it incumbent on the international communist movement to reformulate its tactics in conformity with the situation. The formulation of new tactics naturally resulted in this debate, and in this debate the Hungarian communists were divided into two groups, representing two different points of view. One group belonged to that wing of the international communist movement which recognized that beginning with the second half of the 1920s class power relations had gradually shifted in favour of the bourgeoisie, and that the communists must take this into consideration when elaborating their tactics. The other group belonged to that wing of the international communist movement which denied that changes had taken place in the relations of class forces and wanted to accelerate, in fact, force the revolutionary transformation of Europe through *coup d'état*-like actions.

The consolidation of capitalist Europe was favourable to the political stabilization of the Hungarian counter-revolutionary regime. Therefore, those Hungarian communists who had realistically evaluated the trends in international class power relations were closer to a correct judgement of Hungarian political relations. These people grouped around Jenő Landler, who had been an important leader in the socialist working-class movement even prior to World War I and who, as a revolutionary, became a communist in 1919. In their report summarizing the tasks of the Hungarian illegal party organization – made almost simultaneously with the appointment of István Bethlen as Prime Minister – they concluded that the consolidation by no means served the interests of the petty-bourgeoisie and peasantry, but that of the bourgeoisie. In other words, it served the interests of the class which "after each crisis – the world war and the revolution were such crises – must turn to higher forms of organization, and endeavour to attain newer centralization of capital. This experiment is under way throughout the world. Stinnes and Lepucheur are representatives of this experiment abroad,

²³ Karl Habsburg, last emperor and king of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy attempted on two occasions, on March 25 – April 5, 1921 and between October 20–27, 1921, to restore the rule of the House of Habsburg at least in Hungary, relying on Hungarian royalist political groups. His trips to Hungary, of a *coup d'état* nature, created political crises on both occasions. On his first return the Teleki administration was forced to resign. On his second return there was armed conflict between the armed units which again swore allegiance to him and the troops faithful to the government.

²⁴ The programme of the Minister for Finance, Loránd Hegedüs, (December 1920 – September 1921) was to stop inflation and stabilize the value of the crown. The economic rehabilitation plan based on a capital levy and not on foreign loans was defeated by the resistance of the Hungarian ruling classes. The wealthy classes would not undertake the burdens necessary for reestablishing the balance of the state budget and they hoped for an economic boom from the maintenance of inflation. István Bethlen's endeavours for the establishment of a united government party succeeded only when the Prime Minister broke with his earlier concepts of crystallizing the government party around the Christian National Union Party, and when together with several of his political partners, he joined the KGP.

²⁰ Rudas, L.: "Fordulópont" (Turning Point), *Proletár*, May 5, 1921.

²¹ "Bethlen learned much from the Tiszas," wrote the editors in the introduction to the volume, "István Bethlen's Secret Papers". "He understood the essence of the fusion of Kálmán Tisza (1875): how to ensure the power of one party for three decades by eliminating the opposition which relied on the votes of the Hungarian peasantry of the Great Plain. From István Tisza he learned how to restore that system using the funds of finance capital." *Bethlen István titkos iratai* (István Bethlen's Secret Papers), p. 26, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1972. The volume was prepared for publication and the introduction and explanations were written by Miklós Szinai and László Szűcs.

²² Rudas, L.: "Klasszikus példa" (Classic Example), *Proletár*, July 21, 1921.

and the Commercial Bank which stands behind Loránd Hegedüs is its representative in Hungary"²⁵ This quotation well illustrates the fact that one group of Hungarian communists had already earlier recognized the interests of the finance capitalists who were urging consolidation. The analysis, which was more precise regarding the class content of the regime, also maintained that consolidation was accompanied by the strengthening of the counter-revolutionary system, in other words, of the position of capitalism in Hungary.

This was not the conclusion drawn by the other group which had gathered around Béla Kun. In the autumn of 1921 they too recognized that the Bethlen consolidation meant the rule of finance capital and the large landowners. They denied, however, that this also meant the strengthening of state power. They believed that the elimination of the White Terror and of the open terroristic dictatorship signified a weakness in the system and concluded that the possibilities for an early collapse existed.²⁶

The elections which were held in mid-1922 reflected the political strengthening of the counter-revolutionary regime.²⁷ The results of the parliamentary elections and the growing consolidation of the counter-revolutionary regime naturally drew the attention of the communists, who were preparing an analysis of the situation. This was reflected in the underground Hungarian communist paper – the *Kommün*, which was published and distributed illegally in Budapest between February and September 1922 – and in other documents too. They had to explain what the economic conditions were for the stabilization of the system, and what political consequences were to be drawn from the composition and function of Parliament. In the fact that the extreme right-wing commandos were pushed into the background they recognized those factors which were related to the efforts aimed at restoring the country's economic life. They concluded that the White Terror had to cease because it was "overshadowing consolidation", and preventing the government from making the foreign contacts absolutely necessary for economic stabilization. They had no illusion as to the function of Parliament. Long before, already during the 1922 election campaign, they emphasized that the Hungarian Parliament in no way resembled the parliaments of the bourgeois democracies. This parliament was considered as no more than a means to "mask the sheer madness of the counter-revolution". Precisely for this reason they warned the opposition parties not to overestimate what could be achieved in parliamentary struggles. But they did not underestimate Parliament and urged that the working class participate increasingly in the elections despite the fact that under the circumstances the KMP could not run candidates.

In the early 1920s the communists finally evaluated the counter-revolutionary regime as a reactionary bourgeois dictatorship in which the large landowner and finance capital, the rulers, and the entire system blocked all roads to social progress. As for the activities of the classes and parties in 1919–1921 they drew the conclusion that after the internal struggles of the ruling groups in Hungarian

²⁵ PI Archives, fond 500, unit 2/6.

²⁶ PI Archives, fond 500, unit 2/681.

²⁷ At the May-June 1922 elections the United Party (government party) gained 143 of the 245 mandates, in other words, an absolute majority. The various groups of the Christian opposition received 30 mandates. The liberal bourgeois parties received 14 mandates, and the Social Democratic Party of Hungary 25 mandates.

society and the consolidation, social progress was represented by only one class, the proletariat, whose democratic and proletarian demands must be kept on the agenda.

The communists fought for the retention of the legal organizations of the working class. They not only emphasized the importance of trade unions, but also made use of the legal opportunities they provided for the struggle to reorganize the KMP. The communists strove to make use of all legal possibilities for the expression of the working class, while at the same time they sharply criticized the compromising policies of the reformist leaders of the MSzDP. Their criticism of the capitulationist policies of the reformist right-wing leaders was well founded, but it contained too prejudiced a view of the social democratic movement as such. This was to a certain extent, natural, since two parties of the same class – true, in essentially different positions – sought to solve the future of the proletariat on the basis of diametrically opposed political concepts. The terror which the working class suffered did not in itself create the possibility for a joint struggle by the two parties.

In this period, although the proletariat was stricken most heavily by the open terrorist dictatorship, as a result of the fundamentally different concepts, positions, etc. of the two parties, views critical of each other's political existence, denouncing each other, and vindicating each's own absolute right over the fate of the proletariat, dominated in the leadership of both parties.

The Analysis of Hungarian Social Relations at the First Congress of the Hungarian Party of Communists

By the mid-1920s there was social tranquillity in Europe to a certain extent. A political consolidation had taken place, not only within the individual capitalist countries, but also in international life. The Soviet Union had successfully defeated intervention and domestic counter-revolution and could continue its work of construction under comparatively calmer conditions.

The general stability of the capitalist world had a favourable influence on Hungarian consolidation. The system became stronger, the united government party was master of the political situation, and parliament functioned in the spirit of the Bethlen administration's concepts. Each party operated within a determined "framework". The liberal bourgeois opposition parties were content to conform to the system, since they were unable to win a significant place in either domestic or foreign policy. They had little political weight, and no comprehensive democratic programme or mass base.

In comparison with the period of the White Terror the conditions for the mass political and economic activity of the working class had improved. The legal party of the working class, the MSzDP had representatives in the Parliament, while the trade unions also carried on legal organizational activity. The MSzDP was the most left-wing legal party in the system. As a reform party, under the leadership of right-wing social democrats, it was content to carry on a limited defense of working-class interests and adjusted to the conditions of the Bethlen regime. Its members struggled within the trade unions for the realization of their economic rights. However, in political life it was satisfied with the parliamentary role its

parliamentary fraction carried out and which, alongside actual political struggle, reeked of pseudo-radicalism.²⁸

Several of the groups which had played a significant role in the earlier period of open terrorist dictatorship were dropped from power. These then became part of the opposition.²⁹ Others following the obvious defeat of their political concepts "accepted" the situation, and undertook further cooperation in the county and state apparatus, the army, and in the leadership of the gendarmerie and police. In general, members of the so-called "Szeged-group" continued to be important factors of power as the pillars of the state bureaucracy.

The political strengthening of the Bethlen administration was accompanied by economic stabilization, which, in turn, temporarily strengthened political consolidation. By the mid-1920s those forms of economic life, which had followed World War I, could no longer remain in operation. Normal conditions for the establishment of a peace economy had to be created. An end had to be put to the rapid deterioration of money, the inflationary boom had to be stopped for it no longer hit only the working classes but also seriously endangered the profits of capital invested in production and commerce. The state budget also had to be straightened out.

The Hungarian ruling classes effectuated economic stabilization by making use of the foreign capital obtained through the so-called League of Nations loan.³⁰

The loan was not only used for the development of economic life and for productive investments. A large part was spent on the reinforcement of the state apparatus and on direct support for the ruling classes. The loan, though bringing no great upsurge in the country's economic life, undoubtedly brought significant structural changes in industry, advanced the interests of finance capital and, in creating economic stability, strengthened the government. At the same time the economic policy of the regime, under which the working classes carried the whole burden of the exorbitant interest became a new source for the sharpening of social contradictions. Therefore, even the most stable years of the Bethlen consolidation were permeated with the signs of crisis indicative of the relativity of the capitalist regime's stabilization.

Even in the comparatively calm years of the Bethlen consolidation the KMP was illegal. Conditions were more favourable compared to previous years because the pressure on the working class had eased. The persistent work over the years to reorganize the party bore fruit and by the mid-1920s the organizational framework for the KMP was reinforced and the mass influence of the communists increased. Thus it became timely and possible for the first party congress to be convened in Vienna in August 1925. And this was the first time in the Hungarian communist movement, which had been working underground for six years, that views could be exchanged on the tasks facing the party between the communists

²⁸ See György Borsányi's study in this volume.

²⁹ In August 1923 Gyula Gömbös, Ferenc Eckhardt, Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, Ferenc Ulain and several others formed a new party under the name of Race-Protector Party.

³⁰ The League of Nations loan came by way of British intercession. It came to 250 million gold crowns, which amounted to 307.5 million pengős at the 1926 value of the pengő. A 7.5 per cent interest had to be paid on the loan. The League of Nations appointed an American envoy to control the use of the loan. Therefore Hungary's fiscal and economic policies were put under Anglo-American control.

active in the movement at home and the party leaders, most of whom lived in emigration. The three points on the congress agenda dealt with the political, social and economic conditions in Hungary. The most comprehensive theses and paper of Hungarian society was a report titled "The Political Situation in Hungary, the Tasks of the Working Class and the Hungarian Party of Communists". The subject was presented by Béla Kun. The theses summarized those events which had taken place in Hungary following the overthrow of the Republic of Councils. It summarized those views which had already been expressed in the written works of the communists in the earlier period. It again determined, with regard to the relation of forces of the counter-revolutionary regime, that "Hungary is ruled by the combined power of the large landowners and finance capital in which finance capital is striving for leadership."³¹ This endeavour of finance capital was related to the financial reorganization, which strengthened the finance capitalist stratum of the ruling classes. At the same time the theses pointed to one characteristic feature of finance capital, its internationalism, which also influenced political life and resulted in the fact that Hungary's economic life was placed at the mercy of the international finance capitalists.³²

The theses presented by Béla Kun were not limited simply to a review of already known views on the power relations, or to an elaboration of those, but instead subjected society to further analysis. This more profound analysis was made possible since the communist movement had been strengthened and conditions were more stable than before thus making a more precise analysis and more realistic conclusions possible. Aside from this, a complex examination of conditions in Hungary could take place only at a larger meeting where the representatives of the underground party at home and its trained leaders who had been forced abroad could carry out this task jointly.

This is what happened at the First Congress of the KMP. Prior to a more basic examination of the different classes and strata and their mutual relationship, the theses dealt with the organizational state of the whole society.

The theses drew conclusions on the degree of organization of Hungarian society by dividing society into three categories. In their opinion the wealthy classes were better organized than they had been prior to World War I. With regard to trends in the organization of the proletariat the theses stated that there had been a decline in comparison to the previous period. It regarded the middle classes – the urban petty-bourgeoisie, the rural petty-bourgeoisie (in this case the small owners, and owners of dwarf plots) as better organized than before. However the thesis also stated that finance capital was endeavouring to break up this organization of the middle classes.

³¹ PI Archives, fond 500, unit 2/79.

³² Hungarian literature on economic history also concludes that economic rehabilitation "Was not only through loans fleeing the undeveloped country for the benefit of the more developed capitalist countries, but the Bethlen government was unable to exploit the possibilities inherent even in a credit granted under capitalist conditions. The state's complete lack of conception and foresight regarding economic policy and the unhindered assertion of greedy pettiness minimized the effect of the loan on the development of the economy. As a result, the heavy burden of the debt which brought no real profit to the national economy drove the country to a state of strong financial dependency." Berend, T.I. and Ránki, Gy.: *Magyarország az első világháború után 1919–1929* (Post World War I Hungary, 1919–1929), p. 189, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1966.

In the greater degree of organization of Hungarian society than prior to 1914 the prevailing trend of capitalist opposition to the revolutionary movement throughout Europe was expressed. Beside this correct recognition, the theses did not indicate in what form the rise in the organization of the ruling classes appear. The leading party of the regime, the United Party, did not in itself reflect this organization, it had never become a nation-wide party with local organizations. However, its members held the key political positions. At the same time the counter-revolutionary regime permitted the operation of social organizations which accorded with its own policies, and ensured them great political, social and even economic liberty. The Hungarian Society was a federation of the fellowship of university youth and organizations protecting the interests of the patriotic associations.

With regard to the conclusions of the theses on the organization of the proletariat, they were essentially correct views but also contained mistakes. The organization of the proletariat in the Horthy period, as compared with the 1913 period, showed a temporary growth. In the years prior to the war the total number of the industrial proletariat in Hungary, including the miners, was about one million. At the same time the number of workers organized in trade unions was 107,484, in other words, about 10 per cent of the proletariat. In the early 1920s about 462,000 workers were employed in industry and mining. In 1920 the number of trade union members was 152,441, which was 30 per cent of the workers. In the following two years this number continued to grow. It was only in the mid 1920s that the number of organized workers began to decline, and then this downward trend became characteristic.³³ Therefore, in comparison to the years prior to World War I. the organization of the proletariat did not decline in the first years of the counter-revolution. However, there was a decline as compared to 1918–1919. This, however, would not be a correct comparison, for in 1918, during the bourgeois-democratic revolution, not only craft unions were formed but all strata of society joined either newly organized, or existing trade unions, so that they no longer were organizations to protect the interests of the proletariat. Therefore the figures for 1918–1919 do not present a realistic picture of the organization of the proletariat, and a comparison between these figures and those of the 1920s are also misleading. This is why the conclusions drawn in the theses on the organization of the proletariat were incorrect.

Year	Membership	Year	Membership	Year	Membership
1913	107,484	1920	152,441	1923	176,401
1918	721,437	1921	152,577	1924	127,526
1919	214,908	1922	202,956	1925	125,024

However, the trend which the theses reviewed at the party congress, did exist. In later years the organization of the proletariat lagged behind industrial development, and while the proletariat also increased numerically, the numbers

³³ *A szakszervezeti mozgalom Magyarországon 1923–1925* (The trade-union movement in Hungary, 1923–1925), p. 61, Világosság Rt., Budapest, 1926.

organized in trade unions dropped continuously. Apart from the negative effect the regime had on the proletariat, the development of the industrial structure itself also played a role. In Hungary, in the mid-1920s light industry began to develop, and within this, primarily the textile industry, while heavy industry stagnated. Light industry, however, employed a majority of women workers, who were more difficult to organize. It also employed a large number of semi-skilled and unskilled workers who had come from the villages and were politically uneducated.

The evaluation of the theses on the organization of the middle classes combined correct conclusions with several definitions which were not precise. Neither the finance capital nor the large landowner class were delighted with the increased political activity of these strata. It is a fact, and this bears out the theses' conclusions that the formation of the United Party coincided with the dissolution of the Small Holders' Party, the political party of the landowning peasantry.³⁴ However, despite all endeavours, the formation of a peasant party to protect the interests of the poor and small peasantry was only achieved during the final stage of the Horthy period.³⁵

The organizational possibilities of the urban petty-bourgeoisie were also limited, and it was not accidental that the liberal opposition parties never became truly nation-wide parties. Of the opposition parties, even if to a limited degree, only the MSZDP was able to build up organizations in the rural areas. The social organizations previously mentioned attracted the petty-bourgeoisie to their ranks too. There were also special alliances and organizations to protect the interests of the urban and rural petty-bourgeoisie, which were also under the control of the counter-revolutionary government and served their interests.

The theses also took both the community of interests and the contradictions of the social classes and strata into account.

The true situation was reflected in the conclusions which emphasized the state of "power and economic balance" which came about among the ruling classes. The establishment of this balance was the greatest success of the Bethlen consolidation. This was the foundation of its stability. In weighing the role of the tension arising from the common power interests and the contradictory economic interests of the ruling classes and in the relationship between finance capital and the large landowners, the theses found the arguments to explain the reason for their cooperation. The theses stated that the most important of these was the possibility for joint oppression of the industrial and agricultural proletariat. It stressed the primacy of the common political interests of finance capital and the large landowners but this political community of interest constantly came into conflict with conflicting economic interests. The conclusions of the theses were essentially correct despite the fact that it did not examine the actual economic contradictions which existed in the mid-1920s.

These conclusions regarding the middle strata and the peasantry were very important for a proper estimation of Hungarian society. They also examined the

³⁴ The Independent Small Holders' Party (FKGP) was founded in October 1930. See the study by György Borsányi in this volume.

³⁵ The National Peasant Party was founded in June 1939.

individual groups within the urban petty-bourgeoisie. The theses concluded that the urban petty-bourgeoisie, whose individual groups were examined separately, were uniformly placed in opposition to the revolution, to the anti-private ownership measures of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The blood bath of the counter-revolution and its political measures cut large gaps in this "fusion". A part of the urban petty-bourgeoisie, the civil servants, did not like the fact that the large landowners and finance capitalists had driven the political exponents of the middle strata from power. Despite the umbrage of certain groups of the petty-bourgeoisie, the theses marked them as that part of Hungarian society to which the open counter-revolutionary dictatorship was essentially suited. In other words, they formed the urban social base for the counter-revolutionary regime. This was an important, new recognition. A part of the intelligentsia, and the Jewish petty-bourgeoisie understandably did not approve of the counter-revolutionary extremes. The theses drew the following conclusions with respect to the latter that they "want the democratic liquidation of counter-revolution under the leadership of the royalists".³⁶

The urban petty-bourgeoisie was already strongly infected with the nationalist propaganda of the counter-revolutionary regime and therefore the theses was correct in stating that the political activity of the petty-bourgeoisie was expressed in irredentism. The Hungarian communists regarded the economic position of the petty-bourgeoisie as serious because the retail merchants and private craftsmen were burdened by bank interests and the credit policy of the capitalists, while at the same time the considerable anti-labour section of the petty-bourgeoisie wanted to profit from the counter-revolution.

Therefore, in the mid-1920s the petty-bourgeoisie was divided between those who supported the regime and those who opposed it. Those opposed were for the most part politically indifferent, and became reconciled to the situation. The dissatisfaction stemming from measures which directly infringed on the interests of the petty-bourgeoisie was not considered by the communists to be sufficient to lead to struggle against the system.

After sketching out the political features and presumable political atmosphere of the urban petty-bourgeoisie, the theses surveyed the Hungarian village. In discussing the different strata of the peasantry they endeavoured to present a faithful picture of the Hungarian village of the 1920s.

They drew the correct conclusion that the village bourgeoisie (the rich peasants), this social strata which in former years supplied the military officers for the reaction, continued to be a bastion of counter-revolution. It had great social weight. War and inflation freed it from debt, its holdings had grown as the result of the land reform, but it would have liked to continue to expand at the expense of the large landowners.³⁷ These rich peasants, whose political position was anti-Habsburg and irredentist, accepted Horthy, and were in fact his most reliable supporters.

³⁶ PI Archives, fond 500, unit 2/79.

³⁷ According to the 1920 census the rich peasants (earners and dependents) comprised 6.97 per cent of the agricultural population with from 20–100 *holds* (1.42 acres) of land. *Magyar Statisztikai Közlemények*, Új sorozat, No. 76, p. 114. In the Nagyatádi land reform the holdings of the large peasants increased by 10,158 *holds*.

The position of the small holders was in sharp contrast to this. The greater part of the Hungarian peasantry had hoped to get the land it had not received from the revolution from the counter-revolution and since its thirst for land had remained unsatisfied,³⁸ it was becoming disillusioned with the counter-revolutionary regime. The theses referred to those political events which led to the liquidation of the Small Holders' Party, and to those political defeats previously suffered, in the early 1920s, by the Small Holders' Party as to universal suffrage, credit policy and public administration reform demands, etc. In contrast with the village bourgeoisie the small holders had not become stronger economically either. In fact, as the theses pointed out, the small holders had become indebted.

The picture which the communist painted of the dwarf-plot owners also conformed with Hungarian reality. According to the theses the position of the dwarf-plot owners was identical with that of the agrarian proletariat. This strata was not even promised concessions by the counter-revolutionary regime, its land stocks did not change, its political rights were strongly limited, and as a result of its being tied to the land, it was hit by unemployment.

In general we can conclude that the theses made a realistic survey of the economic situation and political features of the Hungarian village as well as of its inherent social contradictions.³⁹

In conclusion, the theses examined the position of the industrial and agricultural proletariat. They were regarded as the most oppressed class of society but the social changes taking place within their ranks were pointed out. Apart from the effect which the country's industrialization had on the structural changes in the proletariat, they contributed importance to the changing generations and called attention to the effect that the appearance of the new generation had on its composition. The Hungarian communists, from the point of view of the changes taking place in the proletariat were at this time too optimistic regarding future struggles and too hopeful in their estimation of social change. They viewed the rejuvenation of the industrial and agrarian proletariat as a favourable turn which would make political struggle easier. "They have grown to adulthood physically and are turning left politically", the theses on the industrial proletariat pointed out. Then, on the agricultural proletariat the theses concluded: "A new generation has also grown up in this strata, a generation which feels closer to the city and the industrial workers, and precisely for this reason it puts up greater resistance to the leadership of the village bourgeoisie."⁴⁰

³⁸ The Nagyatádi land reform effected 1,224,189 cadestral *holds* (1 c. h. = 2.27 acres). However, in the period between 1921 and 1925 the land of the large estates declined by almost 450,000 *holds*, and the small holdings grew accordingly. Therefore, the greater part of the land had new owners in such a way that it caused no significant change in the number of holdings in excess or under 100 *holds*. *Földmunkás és szegényparaszt mozgalmak Magyarországon 1848–1948* (Agricultural Proletarian and Poor Peasant Movements in Hungary, 1848–1948), edited by Ferenc Pölöskei and Kálmán Szakács, vol. 2, p. 634, Táncsics Kiadó, Budapest, 1962.

³⁹ The realistic situation-analysis of the first Congress of the KMP was the basis of which, with the cooperation of the Hungarian communists, the agricultural policy of the legal left-wing party formed in April 1925, the Socialist Workers' Party of Hungary, the MSzMP, was founded. The agricultural programme of the MSzMP, which was made public in March 1926, was the first Marxist agrarian programme which determined the peasant policy of the revolutionary working-class party through a many-sided and concrete analysis of agricultural relations in Hungary.

⁴⁰ PI Archives, fond 500, unit 2/79.

They ignored the negative social and ideological influence the counter-revolution had precisely on the young in both strata of the proletariat. They thought that the proletariat was better prepared to accept Marxism-Leninism than it actually was.

In judging the classes and social strata the theses took into consideration the political activities of the opposition parties too. It examined what possibilities existed under the counter-revolutionary regime for the activities of one or another political party. It returned to the question which had been examined earlier: what is the purport of the parliamentary system under counter-revolutionary conditions. In judging the constitutionality of the system the authors of the theses were not misled by the fact that in the mid-1920s the government had granted greater freedom to the liberal parties than it had in the past. The Hungarian communists clearly saw and correctly noted the way the government held Parliament in check. This was accomplished through the revision of parliamentary regulations and by the law on the reorganization of the Budapest Municipal Committee.⁴¹

The former was introduced despite all protests by the opposition, and with the latter they prevented the opposition parties, which had received a majority in the 1925 legal elections, from turning the Budapest Municipal Committee into a citadel for the bourgeois opposition.

There were two questions on which the theses on Hungarian political and social questions were incorrect. Both were closely related to consolidation and relation of forces. The theses' authors did not evaluate correctly the role of Miklós Horthy in the period of consolidation. They viewed Miklós Horthy solely as the representative of the commandos and for this reason they believed that with the commandos having been pushed into the background, the dusk of Miklós Horthy's political leadership had arrived. They did not see clearly that within the large landowner-finance capitalist alliance there was still room for a third political force, the gentry-military officer-state-administration strata. They ignored their prior, correct conclusion, which had not lost its topicality, that the ruling classes, the large landowners and finance capitalists needed Miklós Horthy, and he remained an essential element of consolidation.

Nor was the danger of Royalism judged in accordance with its true social weight. They did not recognize the fact that neither domestic nor foreign policy conditions were favourable to a Habsburg restoration. They did not take into account the fact that following the second royal coup in autumn 1921⁴², the Bethlen concept had been approved and they had given their support to the United Party. Therefore the theses were not precise in the analysis of Royalism as the policy for the restoration of the Habsburg monarchy. However, the conclusions on the effects of royalism on the liberal opposition to the regime are noteworthy. The theses disclosed that very special phenomenon, that within the Hungarian

⁴¹ The government bill on tightening up parliamentary regulations was passed on December 24, 1924. Records of the House of Representatives, vol. 27, p. 683, 1922. In essence, the reorganization meant institutionalizing the system of life long members. This group, whose members were appointed by the head of state – essentially kept local government under their control and they could prevent any attempt at reform. Hungarian Laws, 1924 Articles. Page 480, article 26 on the reorganization of the Budapest Municipal Committee.

⁴² The abortive *coup d'état* of Karl Habsburg IV between October 20–27, 1921 to regain his throne.

bourgeois opposition there was a mixture of the ideals of democracy, liberalism and royalism. This was seen in the fact, among others, that part of the royalist followers held positions in the liberal opposition parties. The theses emphasized the political content of this peculiar alliance, and its consequences on the struggles of the opposition against the regime: "The struggle for democracy and universal suffrage in Hungary is not even being carried on under the banner of the bourgeois republic",⁴³ they wrote.

All the findings of the communists at their first congress regarding the social relations of the counter-revolutionary regime, were vital, despite the incorrect evaluation of two points. It was a faithful reflection of the actual path of the development of social processes in Hungary. Quite naturally, the analytical work of the communists was never a goal in itself. All their conclusions on the various classes, parties and the entire system were needed in their political activity. In possession of this picture of Hungarian society, they were able to elaborate a more mature policy than before for the communist movement at home. This was expressed in practically every other point of the agenda approved at the congress.

It is clear from everything that has been quoted here from the analysis and the theses debated and approved by the Hungarian communists at their first congress that the Hungarian communists viewed the political rule which had followed the overthrow of workers' power in Hungary in 1919 as a profoundly reactionary one. And although they themselves, as a movement of proletariat, had the task to wage the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, they increasingly recognized that in Hungary the fight for democracy and socialism was an inseparable task extending over an entire historical era. This recognition was an important step forward in the theoretical and practical work of the KMP. It became a basis to which the party was able to return when, as a result of the advance of fascism of the international scale, the anti-fascist struggle in Hungary placed popular front policy in the forefront.

At that time, in the mid-1920s, however, the communists had not yet consciously connected the struggle for democracy with the fight against fascism, since they did not see political reaction in Hungary as a fascist dictatorship. Their views on this question coincided with the views of the international communist movement on fascism. At that time fascism was not yet the powerful international political factor that it became in the 1930s. However, as a result of the events in Italy, the international communist movement began to concern itself with defining the nature of fascism. All analysis of the international revolutionary labour movement emphasized that from the political and social point of view fascism differed from the traditional manifestations of Capital's attacks. They searched for this "difference" primarily in the social composition of the fascist movement and the relationship between capital and the fascist movement (they believed these movements to be petty-bourgeois), and their views had not yet been crystalized.⁴⁴

⁴³ PI Archives, fond 500, unit 2/79.

⁴⁴ Radek, K.: "Der internationale Faschismus und die Kommunistische Internationale", *Internationale Presse Korrespondenz*, July 14, 1923.

The fact that the Hungarian communist movement viewed Miklós Horthy and his commandos as the Hungarian exponents of fascism, was related to this concept of fascism by the international working-class movement. However, they did not view the power formation which developed when the commandos were pushed into the background.

In subsequent years the communists devoted increased attention to several important features of fascism and connected the concept of political reaction to that of the fascist dictatorship in the case of Hungary as well.

Analyses and Debates Among the Communists in the Late 1920s and Early 1930s

In the latter half of the 1920s the capitalist world regarded its comparative and partial stabilization as unshakable. In those countries which were bourgeois democracies prior to World War I, life progressed under comparatively balanced political and economic circumstances. At the same time the young fascist dictatorships became stronger, first of all in Italy. At that time too, the bourgeois democracies of Germany and Austria which had been formed in the central region of Europe following 1918 were laden with contradictions. In these countries the counter-revolutionary fascist groups continued to enjoy broad freedom of organization. In Central Europe fascist *coup d'états* disturbed the apparently still waters of the comparative stabilization of capitalism.

The danger of fascism continued throughout Europe. In accordance with this the international revolutionary working-class movement, and, within it the Hungarian communists, increasingly dealt with the question. In general they judged the situation as "the democracies are retreating step by step in face of the fascist movements".⁴⁵

In the latter half of the 1920s the counter-revolutionary regime in Hungary continued to grow in strength. Success in foreign policy was accompanied by stabilization in domestic policy. The Bethlen government was oriented primarily towards Britain and Italy. In world politics the Hungarian counter-revolutionary regime appeared on the scene and endeavoured to adjust simultaneously to its foreign policy partners, to Britain, which regarded its ancient and conservative constitutionality to be of great importance and to young, fascist Italy. In the latter half of the 1920s, as a result of the 1926 parliamentary elections⁴⁶ the constitutional feature of the regime was strengthened and the conservative forms were given a larger role than before. Of these most significant was the re-institution of

⁴⁵ "A demokrácia válságai" (The Crises of Democracy), *Új Március*, May, 1926.

⁴⁶ The parliamentary elections were held on December 8–10, 1926. The total number of mandates was 245. Of these the parties supporting the government received 216, with the following breakdown: United Party, 170 (143 in the preceding Parliament), Christian Party, 35 (previously 20), and other parties supporting the government 11 (previously 14). The Race-Protector Party received 3 (it had no parliamentary representative in the previous Parliament). The Opposition: Social Democratic Party, 14 (previously 25). The Liberal groups together, 12 (previously 25).

the Upper House in 1926.⁴⁷ In 1927, the government wanted to change its previous labour policy. It experimented with the reorganization of the socialist trade unions on the lines of the fascist example. In early 1927, the Bethlen administration elaborated a draft for the nationalization of the trade unions. The draft stipulated that the government would no longer tolerate the political activities of the labour organizations. At the same time the draft curtailed the trade union's economic jurisdiction as well.

The establishment of the Upper House met with the sympathy of the ruling classes. Finance capital did not wholly support the proposal for the nationalization of the trade unions, and it was finally defeated by the resistance of the workers.

However, before the Bethlen government had reached the peak of its stabilization with the 1926 elections, Hungarian political life was shaken by a scandal which, under the label of franc counterfeiting, appeared not only in Hungarian history, but in the columns of international scandal chronicles as well.⁴⁸ Documents, which have been made public, proved that together with the large landowners and finance capitalists, the gentry-military officer-state official strata continued to play a significant role in the alliance of the Hungarian ruling classes. Therefore, there was no grounds to what the communists had maintained in the evaluation of the First Congress of the KMP, that the representatives of open fascist dictatorship had been completely driven from political power. The fascist elements had penetrated into the Bethlen regime.

The year 1928 not only signaled disturbances in international political life, but the beginning of economic crisis as well. The agricultural crisis again brought contradictions within the ruling classes to the forefront. How did contemporary Hungarian communists see all this?

Beginning in mid-1926, communist literature disclosed an increasing number of identical features between Hungarian political reaction and the fascist dictatorships appearing in Europe. The evaluation of political reaction in Hungary as a fascist dictatorship was made only in 1929. From that time on fascism as a theoretical question and serious problem effecting practical work was analysed by the Hungarian communists.

The communists engaged in intensive and comprehensive analyses at their party conference held in July 1928, and then in the theses which were prepared for the scheduled Second Party Congress. These analyses again aroused debate within the KMP. In the debate of the new analyses, old views were again revived.

⁴⁷ In Hungary, prior to 1918, Parliament consisted of two houses. The Upper House – its contemporary name was the House of Peers – was eliminated by the bourgeois-democratic revolution of 1918. The counter-revolutionary regime considered a single house Parliament as constitutionally transitional. But the opportunity to restore the Upper House came only in 1926. The newly organized Upper House reflected the changes which had taken place in the circles of the ruling classes. In contrast to pre-1918 conditions, when the member of this body came solely from the aristocracy, the 1926 Upper House gave seats to members of the aristocracy, to the aristocracy of wealth, and to the leaders of state and social bodies.

⁴⁸ With the knowledge of the Hungarian Prime Minister, and with state support, under the organization of Hungarian secret societies the Cartographical Office printed counterfeit foreign currency. The intention was to sell the counterfeit money, in this case, French francs, in Western Europe. The government intended to use the profits from this cover the costs of its nationalist-revisionist policy in the countries of the Little Entente. Its attempt failed, and its envoy was caught by the police in the first attempt to exchange the money.

The series of debates were opened by the so-called "Julius Theses". The theses were prepared by Gyula Alpári, member of the Central Committee of the KMP, who played a significant role in the international communist movement and was also known under the name of "Julius" and edited the paper of the Communist International, the *Internationale Presse Korrespondenz*. In his theses he took a stand against those views which again held that the Hungarian counter-revolutionary regime was some sort of Bonapartism. "The Bonapartist recipe, in which Bethlen has mixed up different contradictory and diverging class interests, is today hardly suitable for being further concocted in the kitchen of politics. The contradictory class and strata interests clash with increasing frequency and sharpness: the elements, which in any event can be kept together with great difficulty, are beginning to come apart. The fascist policy is facing a crisis, and the United Party is facing dissolution."⁴⁹ Alpári countered the analogy of Bonapartism with the assertion that it appears only in revolutionary periods. In the Hungary of the mid-1920s, however, the characteristic features of Bonapartism were missing: that of playing off the lower classes of the population against the wealthy classes. Alpári was right in this, for in contrast to the Bonapartist-Horthy regime analogy formulated in the early 1920s, under the conditions of consolidated political power the major characteristic of Bonapartism was missing: "The manoeuvring of state power which leans on the military clique (on the worst elements of the army) for support, between two hostile classes and forces, which more or less balance each other."⁵⁰

However, in his theses Alpári also denied the existence of a fascist dictatorship in Hungary. In his opinion, fascism, just as Bonapartism, can come about only in a revolutionary era. He denied that fascism can be consolidated, that the political factors of the counter-revolutionary period of 1919–1921 were an organic part of state power. According to Alpári, the ruling classes had eliminated these factors in the early 1920s. Alpári therefore did not recognize a very special feature of the counter-revolutionary regime, namely, that from amongst the commandos only the most extreme elements had been eliminated by the regime, while the rest became its supporters within the state apparatus. Alpári's opinion on the nature of Hungarian counter-revolutionary power was that it was a bourgeois dictatorship which, with its class parliament, the Lower and Upper Houses, was in essence the continuation of the pre-1918 political power set up. He evaluated the conservative features of the Bethlen regime as proof of the conservative, bourgeois dictatorship.⁵¹

In this connection contemporary literature raised the question of whether it was true that the conservative liberalism of the Bethlen administration mitigated the counter-revolutionary dictatorship by taking a direction toward democracy.

István Bethlen himself, in a Parliament speech in the spring of 1929, debating the public administration law, referred to the system as "a democracy combined with a modified corporal system." He intended both the Upper House and the large tax payers to play a role in local government to prevent "exaggerated" democracy.

⁴⁹ "Válságszag" (Odor of Crisis), *Új-Március*, January, 1928.

⁵⁰ Lenin, V.I.: *Collected Works*, vol. 25, p. 220, Progress Publishing House, Moscow, 1964.

⁵¹ PI Archives, fond 500, unit 2/73.

A large part of contemporary communist literature saw the special feature of the Hungarian fascist regime, the pillars supporting the counter-revolutionary system in these modifications. In the opinion of the communists, both the restoration of the Upper House and the reform in public administration were intended to reinforce a fascist dictatorship relying on nationalist, peasant cajoling and terroristic regulations. In other words, the conservative form of rule by the Bethlen consolidation was not going in the direction of political "democracy" but towards fascist dictatorship.

The theses prepared for the July 1928 plenary session of the KMP, on the counter-revolutionary regime, supplemented the picture on its internal contradictions with new colours insofar as they dealt with the increased role of the state in detail and qualified it as having some sort of fascist characteristic. In speaking on the state's role in intervention, although they termed the state a Bonapartist-fascist state, they continued to pinpoint earlier conclusions on the organization of society and emphasized that the intervening role of the state operated through the channels of the social organizations. "Therefore, the fascist state structure is that, in contrast with the pre-war state, it not only contains the special feature that it assimilates the social organizations" but that alongside the "normal" repressive organizations of the state it also builds up a series of "social" repressive organizations, that it connects the organization of society with its militarization (the military youth organization, the fascization of the villages), that it extends the functions of the state police to an unprecedented degree, that it puts education in the service of fascization, but also that its economic role has increased significantly in contrast with the past.⁵²

The increasing role of the state was in fact a characteristic trend of the era. This was asserted with particular force in those countries of Central and Eastern Europe where the movements of the proletariat, following World War I, had put the very existence of capitalist exploitation in question.

The theses, in examining intervention by the state, enriched the findings on Hungarian society with another highly noteworthy conclusion. The increased role of the state also resulted in the fact that the representatives of the state organization became linked with the highest circles of the capitalist economy. The process, which the communists noted during the summer of 1928, took place in Hungary too, and developed the social strata, which historical literature still terms as the power elite. This elite expresses the general interests of the classes it represents in the political and economic spheres. In a similar manner to the theses prepared in 1925 and approved by the First Congress of the KMP, the "Julius Theses" examined all classes of Hungarian society and the positions of their parties. In 1925, they found that there was a certain stability in the classes and parties of the Bethlen consolidation, while now, in conformity with reality, their attention turned to the contradictions which were again becoming sharper. They analyzed all of society in their interconnections with political and economic events. As was already shown, the "Julius Theses", by recognizing and elaborating these new features, made the characteristic features of the system even more definite. At the same time, though they drew an essentially correct historical picture, they were unable to come to correct, objective political conclusions on the further "destiny" of the

⁵² *Párttörténeti Közlemények*, pp. 117–118, August 1958.

regime and the task of the communists, as they had in the mid-1920s. The resolutions indicated that debate within the party was disturbing its theoretical work. The theoretical differences of opinion which appeared in the international communist movement had stiffened the political line of the Hungarian party. The outlook, which clearly prevailed, was that the Hungarian revolutionary situation was more favourable, the revolutionary forces more mature and the social forces between the ruling classes and the proletariat were more simple than they really were.

At the same time, when it came to a question as important as the judgement of fascism, the ideological work of the Hungarian communists became more polished. Naturally, this cannot be examined in isolation from the debates which developed within the international revolutionary working-class movement on this question.

The establishment of the Pilsudski dictatorship in Poland already forced the international communist movement and its international organization, the Communist International, to deal more intensively with the new phenomena which were being strengthened throughout Europe. The exchange of views was held at the fourth Congress of the Communist International. In the debate on the definition of fascism, the debating sides searched for the reply as to whether under the given conditions of capitalism fascism was a general trend or not. They asked themselves: was it the bourgeoisie of economically developed or undeveloped countries which made use of fascist dictatorship? The delegation of the Hungarian party also participated in the debate. The members of the Hungarian delegation were not of identical opinion on the debated issues. However, later, in the evaluation of the features of the counter-revolutionary dictatorship in Hungary the reasoning and conclusions accepted were the ones represented in the congress debate by József Révai.⁵³ The summary on the features characterizing fascism in a given stage of capitalism, as presented by Révai, contained several conclusions, which were later confirmed by history and stood the test of the international evaluation of fascism in later periods. At the same time, Révai's conclusions were not free from the concept of the period which took the fight against the social democrats to absurd extremes and accepted the incorrect theory of "social-fascism".

For a number of years the Hungarian party regarded the social democrats as social fascists. This was a barrier to making use of the most important and most successful weapon against fascism, the unity of the working class, and naturally prevented the cooperation of the Hungarian antifascist forces, limiting the party's circle of possible allies.

In the late 1920s and the early 1930s the analyses of the party were already characterized by that sectarian outlook which greeted every current social contradiction as heralding the outbreak of revolution and rapid victory. However, before this view came to prevail in the KMP, it was precisely in the evaluation of the regime as a fascist dictatorship that the question was raised of how and in what manner the party should fight not only for the dictatorship of the proletariat but also for bourgeois-democratic rights. This question was also raised in the theses which examined Hungarian society and the Hungarian relationship of class

⁵³ PI Archives, fond 500, unit 1/73.

forces. The author was György Lukács, a member of the Central Committee of the KMP, the internationally recognized Marxist philosopher. The documents are known to historical literature as the "Blum theses" since the author was at that time living under the pseudonym of Blum.

In the theses⁵⁴ Lukács also made a complete study of the development of the Hungarian counter-revolutionary regime at the different stages of the Bethlen consolidation. The pages of this study, in fact, summarize all of the analyses, surveys and evaluations carried out by the Hungarian communist movement and by Lukács personally, as a member of the Central Committee of the KMP in the 1920s. His analysis presented little that was new in comparison with the earlier ones, but it was rather an extension of the former, a larger source of material, a summary based on more information. By the nature of things, the theses not only again formulated the theoretical achievements of the communist movement to date but several mistakes as well, such as the overestimation of royalism and other issues. However, the features in which the "Blum theses" differ essentially from the other communist documents of the period are in the conclusions. György Lukács concludes that the comparative and transitional stabilization of capitalism had come to an end and the contradictions between the different classes and strata of Hungarian society continued to deepen. However, he did not regard the prospects of a victorious socialist revolution to be as simple as indicated in the works of other contemporary Hungarian communists. The theses analyze the methods which the Hungarian government would use to stabilize its system and also the tasks of the communists in order to defend democracy against the attack of fascism.

Lukács considered two solutions on the part of the ruling classes to be probable: either a shift towards the conservative forms of rule with the participation of the royalist large landowner wing, or "democratization" with the spreading of the fascist mass base of the Bethlen regime. However, he emphasized that despite the new rise in the political activity of the fascist petty-bourgeoisie, the regime would remain the joint rule of the large landowners and big capital unified by finance capital, using the fascist state machinery to maintain its rule.

Taking into consideration the social conditions of Hungary, Lukács was also of the opinion that the opposition petty-bourgeois parties were not fighting for bourgeois democracy, and therefore the struggle for bourgeois democratic freedoms continued to be the task of the communists. But while the Hungarian Party of Communists had always regarded this as but a partial task in the fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat, Lukács now indicated it as an independent task, as the sole possibility of successful struggle against fascism and projected the concept that in Hungary the dictatorship of the proletariat could be attained only after the victory of a democratic dictatorship. With this conclusion, Lukács placed realistic targets before the communist movements, which corresponded with the tasks set by society itself.

The leadership of the KMP, supported by that circle of the international communist movement which dogmatically judged the major tasks of the times, rejected the "Blum theses" as incorrect. Sectarianism and impatient revolutionism, which had once before in the early 1920s appeared within the circles

⁵⁴ PI Archives, fond 677, unit 1/22.

of Hungarian communists, dominated for a time. This essentially sectarian outlook at home and on an international scale hoped that the possibilities of a victorious international revolution would come from the crisis of capitalism. Once again the earlier hope dominated in Hungarian communist circles that a revolution in Germany would change the international balance of class power so as to sweep away the Bethlen regime and open the way to a new revolution of the proletariat in Hungary.

The economic crisis profoundly shook the capitalist world, including Hungarian society. However, the large landowners and finance capitalists succeeded in maintaining their power. In the interests of ensuring their power, the ruling class did experiment with both methods envisaged by the "Blum theses". István Bethlen was replaced on August 24, 1932 by the large landowner Gyula Károlyi, who was known as a conservative. His administration combined conservative political means with open counter-revolutionary methods.

Since the policy of Gyula Károlyi did not fulfil the hopes placed on it by the ruling classes, the holders of Hungarian political power tried the second method too, as the "Blum theses" had forecasted. With the appointment of Gyula Gömbös as Prime Minister, on October 1, 1932, they tried to experiment with the "democratization" of the fascist regime, in other words, to put a politician in the arena who would be able to expand the mass base of the fascist dictatorship.

As is known, the endeavours of Gyula Gömbös to introduce total dictatorship also met with failure. This in essence substantiated the conclusion of the "Blum theses" which stated that despite the increase in the political activity of the fascist petty-bourgeoisie the system would remain in the power of the finance capitalists and large landowners.

In summarizing all that the KMP accomplished in analyzing the social and political situation of Hungary in these years it can be concluded that it was essentially correct in its evaluation of the content and class base of the Hungarian counter-revolutionary system. In elaborating the methods of struggle against the system it often found the road leading to this objective. However, after 1928, the many-sided and fruitful theoretical work was halted for a time by the sectarian, rigid and dogmatic outlook which prevailed in the party.

The experience in struggle of the Hungarian communists, and the internationalism of the revolutionary working-class movement in the mid-1930s made it possible for the Hungarian communist movement to return to the great traditions of the first ten years of underground activities, to the achievements of its creative, theoretical work, which had been temporarily neglected. Theoretical work was once again on the upswing. The KMP evoked the lessons of the 1920s, and again analyzed the historical situation, the class content and base of the system, and, enriched with new concepts and conclusions, it worked out the suitable methods for the struggle against fascism in Hungary.

Some Problems of the Policy of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary in the Period between the Two World Wars (1919-1939)

by

György Borsányi

This brief study, naturally, cannot attempt to review even in its bare outlines, the history of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary (MSzDP) between the two World Wars. And it is not only the magnitude of the task which overwhelms such an attempt; Hungarian historical scholarship still has to undertake a detailed, all-round Marxist analysis which would take into account all of the factors in the history of the MSzDP.

But if we briefly survey the history of the MSzDP, the first thing that immediately strikes us is the contradictions in the subject.

The conditions that determined the activity of Hungarian social democracy after 1919 differed from those of most European social democratic parties. For the first time in history, a nation was faced with a system which from its very inception bore the initial characteristics of the political formation which later came to be known as "fascism".

The MSzDP was the only legal party of the Hungarian working class for twenty-five years. It was a party that fought for bourgeois democracy under essentially fascist conditions. It would be impossible and pointless to deny the positive and progressive content of the struggle from the point of view of the general course of Hungarian history. At the same time, the specific features of the situation lay in the fact that the party was waging this struggle, headed by an ideologically and politically poorly qualified leadership which had rightist attitudes toward fascism and inclined to compromise with the ruling classes.

The history of a party cannot be separated from that of its leadership, but at the same time it is not synonymous with it. On the surface, in everyday life, party policy is represented by the leadership which tries to influence the rank and file. At the same time, it cannot neglect the morale, opinions, customs of the membership that are determined by decades of tradition.

The historian seeking a pattern, a guideline in the multitude of facts, stumbles at every step into contradictions while examining this difficult period of the party's history. Sources disclose an abundance of both positive and negative accomplishments: the initiation of great, heroic strikes – and services rendered to Capital; militant antifascism – and the undertaking to represent the interests of the fascist régime; solidarity with the communists – and handing over communists to the repressive organs of the state.

It would facilitate the task of the historian – and that of the reader – if the front lines were unambiguous, if the positive deeds could be attributed to the rank and file and the negative ones to the leadership. But reality cannot be compressed into

such a simplified formula. On the one hand even the leadership consisted of different kinds of people amongst whom we can find differences that cannot be under-estimated; on the other hand the same people at different times or in different questions have varying opinions, perhaps deviating from their own former standpoints. For example, a person may be opportunist in the question of parliamentary tactics yet ever so militant in the struggle of the workers for their economic interests and vice-versa. And although the rank and file may quite often have criticized the leaders and organized oppositional trends, on the whole they readily accepted them during this twenty year period. Nor can this fact be simply attributed to the manipulation of members, which, by the way, was always done. It is impossible to neglect the constant right-wing pressure on the party brought about by the existence of fascism. This asserted itself in different ways. It was manifested in the fact that the leaders of the fascist regime needed partners with whom it was possible to "work together", and they did satisfy – through various channels – this wish. But it was also manifested in the influence of nationalistic and chauvinistic ideologies on certain sections of the workers, especially in the second half of the 30s. And there were other factors as well. There was the composition of the Hungarian working class and its special historical past, the fact that the communist movement was illegal and that the communists looked upon the social democratic party as their "hinterland". Thus the revolutionary forces that reached political maturity in the party and were capable of leadership, generally gravitated toward the communist movement and devoted their energies to it and not to reforming the MSzDP. Those opposition leaders whose knowledge, prestige and political capacities attained or surpassed the level of the official leadership were in exile. The opposition at home, however, was not on a par with the MSzDP leadership as to political experience and knowledge. It was therefore not too difficult for the latter to manoeuvre by at times acting against them while at other times trying to win them over.

However, the key to the history of the Hungarian social democratic movement in this period was not that of the relationship between the leaders and rank and file. The crucial problem was the struggle of the only legal party of the working class against the fascist state power and the examination of how this party met the requirements of this struggle. In the following we shall try to shed light on some aspects of this question.

The Reorganization of the MSzDP after the Defeat of the Hungarian Republic of Councils

In August 1919, a complicated and confusing situation came about in Hungary. The first Hungarian proletarian state had been defeated by the armed power of the Entente forces. None of the groups of the ruling classes, returning to power, was strong enough to claim a monopoly on power. Although it was evident that a bourgeois-landowners' system was going to succeed the workers' government, it was still to be decided what share of the power would be gained by the various groups of the exploiting classes, by what means power would be exercised and what form the government would take, etc. These questions remained open. The role of the Entente in the restoration foreshadowed that the new system – re-

gardless of who was going to head the state – would not be independent for a long time; its freedom of action in foreign and home policy would be limited.

It was in such a situation that the reorganization of the MSzDP took place on August 24, 1919. At this time the situation of the MSzDP was not clear either politically or legally. It is well-known that on March 21, 1919 the MSzDP united with the Hungarian Party of Communists (KMP). Some of its leaders had held responsible posts in the government of the dictatorship of the proletariat. At the same time those trade union leaders, who during the existence of the Republic of Councils secretly sought to overthrow it, also belonged to the party. They undertook the task of replacing the proletarian government and during their six day rule they essentially restored capitalism.¹

Some of the old leaders (Jenő Landler, József Pogány, Jenő Varga and others), who became communists, carried on their political activities abroad, under the flag of the communist party; there were others who remained social democrats but were in exile and later on joined the Two-and-a-half International (Zsigmond Kunfi, Vilmos Böhm, Zoltán Rónai). Those who stayed at home, also represented different shades of opinion; it was to be decided who actually had the right of continuity.

The leaders, who remained in Hungary in August 1919, had, without exception, belonged to the right wing of the MSzDP before the revolution. The most outstanding personality amongst them was Ernő Garami. For a long time he had been one of the leaders of the MSzDP and editor of the paper *Népszava*. A man of letters, speaking many languages, ideologically well trained, he became known in the course of the struggles for universal suffrage before the War. In the government of the bourgeois revolution of 1918 he was Minister for Trade and did all within his power for the consolidation of bourgeois democracy and to prevent the proletarian revolution. When the Republic of Councils was proclaimed he went into exile rather than join the new united party and came back only after the defeat of the Republic of Councils. During his stay abroad, he had negotiated with the Hungarian white emigré circles and Entente diplomats about the overthrow of workers' power and the reorganization of the country after the revolution. Garami was an internationally well-known figure representing Hungarian social democracy and he was on good terms with the leaders of the Second International. Manó Buchinger, a bookbinder, had the greatest authority amongst the followers of Garami. He had been a member of the MSzDP leadership from 1905 and also sharply dissociated himself from the Republic of Councils. Among the other leaders, Gyula Peidl, the Prime Minister of the government that immediately succeeded the Republic of Councils, Samu Jászai, chairman of the Trade Union Council, Sándor Propper leader of one of the strongest trade unions, the Association of Wood Workers, were also considered to be Garami's followers.

The other wing of the MSzDP leadership was represented by Károly Peyer and his followers. Peyer was born in 1881. He, being an engine-fitter, joined the largest Hungarian trade union, the Association of Iron and Metal Workers, and quickly became a trade union official. He soon became an expert on wage and

¹ On August 1, 1919, when the Republic of Councils Government abdicated under military pressure, the Budapest Workers' Council charged Gyula Peidl, a right-wing trade union leader, with the formation of the new government. See Ágnes Szabó's study in this volume.

labour conditions and he often represented labour in wage negotiations, acquiring great skill in behind-the-scenes bargaining. In contrast to Garami, he was not particularly learned, nor was he interested in theoretical questions. On the other hand, he was at home among the workers, he knew their moods well and was a fairly good speaker. Already before the war he numbered amongst those trade union leaders whose actions were not motivated by theoretical considerations but by day-to-day practical interests. During the Republic of Councils, he was forced to remain in the background and took part in negotiations for its overthrow. His closest followers were János Vanczák, Ferenc Miákits and István Farkas. Vanczák was the Secretary of the Iron Workers' Union and politically a colourless figure without any ideological conviction. Miákits and Farkas were also veteran trade union leaders.

The platforms of the two groups had in common their anti-communism, the rejection of the Republic of Councils and opposition to left-wing and centrist social democracy. If we wanted to briefly characterize the difference – by somewhat simplifying things – we could say that while the Garami group accepted the principles of the extreme right wing of the Second International (approximately that of the Scheidemann-Noske group), the Peyer group had no definite platform of principles whatsoever and were prepared to accept almost any programme as long as it appeared useful to their own positions and that of the trade unions they represented.

It was this group that assumed the task of reorganizing the MSzDP after the defeat of the Republic of Councils. This reorganization took place at the Extraordinary Party Conference held on August 24, 1919. The main report, delivered by Károly Peyer, condemned the proletarian revolution. He said in connection with the Republic of Councils: "It is up to us to expose the baseness of this regime, we must not wait till the bourgeois press will do it." As for the communists, he demanded that "they must be severely punished, they must be put on trial". The Congress passed a resolution that communists and their sympathizers be expelled from the party.²

The other important question at the Congress was that of the relation to the Friedrich government, or rather, to put the question more generally, to decide whether or not to join the government of the counter-revolutionary regime that was being formed. The question itself proves the contradictions of the political situation at the time. While the MSzDP delegates were discussing this question in Budapest, Horthy's bands were hanging and beating to within an inch of their lives dozens of workers, peasants and petty-bourgeois (some of them social democratic party members and functionaries) in the Transdanubian region and Budapest's prisons were packed with people who had taken part in the struggles of the Republic of Councils among them prominent leaders of the party, waiting to be sentenced to death. The working class, frightened by the bloodthirsty revenge of the white counter-revolution, looked with terror to an uncertain future. At the same time the Entente diplomats painted a rosy picture of bourgeois democracy for Hungarian political life. This was held out to the social democratic

leaders when, with certain reservations, they decided to join the forthcoming coalition government.

The Entente attributed great importance to the formation of such a government in Hungary in which all important political trends would be represented (with the exception of the communists). Ernő Garami was therefore invited to represent the MSzDP at these discussions about the formation of a government that would be recognized by the Entente.

The political importance of the MSzDP was determined above all by the fact that it had the backing of the absolute majority of the working class and could rely on their unreserved support. Besides, after two revolutions the ruling classes were quite afraid of the working class. They made some attempts to get the masses of workers away from the MSzDP, first of all by forcing the establishment of Christian Socialist Trade Unions, but workers enrolled in these only where enrollment was a condition of employment. In addition to this, the position of the MSzDP was strengthened by the support of international social democracy, which held strong positions in the Entente countries.

As to the place the MSzDP was supposed to have in the new régime, the opinions of the political partners differed. The liberal bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie of Jewish origin insisted on the acceptance of the MSzDP in political life, hoping to have an effective counter-balance to the extremist anti-semitic terrorist commandos. The politicians of the conservative aristocracy were for the suppression of the working-class movement, and for the gradual liquidation of the social democratic party but they planned to move in this direction only later on. In the given situation they considered that rapid consolidation was the most important task and in order to achieve this – because of the above mentioned reasons of home and foreign policy – they regarded the support of the MSzDP as indispensable. The extreme fascist forces, grabbing more and more political power rather forcefully, wanted to take revenge on the party, they wanted to oust it from the country's political life once and for all by banning the MSzDP and the trade unions, by putting the leaders in jail or even by physically annihilating them.

On November 16, 1919 Horthy's officers' commandos marched into Budapest. With this, indiscriminate mass terror, unbounded by any legal measures and which until then had been confined to the countryside, reached Budapest too. The Entente shut its eyes to this terror. But since an agreement had previously been signed on the establishment of a coalition government, in the new government formed on November 17, headed by Károly Huszár, a clerical politician, the MSzDP also received some portfolios. Károly Peyer became Minister for Welfare, Ferenc Miákits State Secretary of Trade. The participation in the government was preceded by a sharp discussion in the party leadership. Garami and his followers opposed this. In the discussion, however, the Peyer-Vanczák group won the majority; they asserted that thus the MSzDP would contain the terror and contribute to the consolidation of the political situation.

By taking this step, the MSzDP had subordinated its political prestige at home and abroad to the counter-revolutionary reaction, without ensuring its own freedom of action. Though the party had legal status, this recognition was not forced on the ruling classes by the policy of the party but by the objective internal and international political situation. However, this did not result in a mitigation of

² PI Archives, fond 658, unit 1/23.

the terror, in the release of the imprisoned social democrats, and not even in the right to hold undisturbed party meetings.

While the representatives of the MSzDP held posts in the government, young fascists were destroying the editorial office of the *Népszava*. The awkward situation was well reflected by the fact that even the local authorities of a provincial town (Dorog) could prevent the social democratic minister, Peyer, from making a speech to the workers. Small wonder then, that Ernő Garami and his closest followers resigned from the party's leadership and went into exile.

Under such conditions, the participation of the party in the government was merely an illusion. The increasing terror made it pointless for the party to participate in the January 1920 parliamentary elections. Thus the party decided to withdraw its representatives from the government and to boycott the parliamentary elections.

During this period of passivity, right-wing pressure on the party increased. It became practically impossible to hold any meetings, including very often, even those of the leadership. Several trade unions were disbanded. Miners were placed under the control of military commanders. The paper *Népszava* could not be sold on the streets. Terrorist commandos murdered Béla Somogyi, chief editor of *Népszava*, journalist Béla Bacsó and Miklós Cservenka, a social democratic shop steward in one of the engine works. Members of the party leadership received anonymous letters threatening their lives.³

Under the growing pressure, the Peyer-Vanczák leadership chose the tactical solution of expressing and demonstrating at every step its willingness to collaborate with the ruling circles. They tried to convince the government that it was senseless to persecute the party, since they were ready, in exchange for the smallest concessions, to help the regime in attaining both its domestic and international goals. As a result, they were not even deterred from taking steps which remained well under the ethical norms of international social democracy. Thus, in an editorial they greeted Admiral Horthy, the bloody-handed dictator when he was elected governor. "Keeping all our honour, we readily extend our calloused hands to make peace", *Népszava* wrote.⁴ They announced the revision of party policy ("the party will put an end to all passivity and take an active part in building the country")⁵, refuting the contention that the party was revolutionary, unpatriotic and anti-religious. In the party press and in speeches considerable stress was put on the reconcilability of Christian religious ethics with social democratic ideology as well as on the possibility and necessity of identification with the "great national interests" of the counter-revolution. Miákits and Vanczák visited Horthy and offered to "take part, with full devotion in the normalization of the country's life."⁶

They offered some counter-revolutionary politicians that the party would be willing "to take a national stand", to suspend the class struggle and to give up

³ PI Archives, fond 659, unit 1920-10.

⁴ "Kormányzó Úr!" (Mr. Governor!), *Népszava*, March 2, 1920.

⁵ "Szakszervezet és Politika" (Trade Unions and Politics), *Vas- és Fémmunkások Lapja*, March 26, 1920.

⁶ "Ezen a héten alakul meg az új kormány" (The New Government Is To Be Formed This Week), *Népszava*, March 9, 1920.

strikes.⁷ In June 1920, when the International Association of Transport Workers announced the boycott of counter-revolutionary Hungary, the party leadership disavowed this action of the international working class and publicly aligned themselves with the government.

In exchange for all this, the Peyer-Vanczák group asked for nothing more than crumbs of civic liberties: to decrease the number of political trials, to repeal press censorship and to ensure the right of assembly and organization. But for the moment the government gave nothing and, on the contrary, it increased the pressure on the party.

A change set in in the situation of the party after the spring of 1921. Count István Bethlen became Prime Minister on April 14, 1921.⁸ Bethlen was the most gifted politician of the counter-revolution. His aim was to consolidate the counter-revolutionary regime, both at home and abroad. The solution of the "labour problem" and the bringing about of some sort of status quo were unavoidable preconditions for establishing a lasting calm in the country.

Bethlen recognized that the regime had failed in its attempts to organize its own counter-revolutionary workers' organizations and that there was not much hope of success in the future either. Therefore, the workers had to be integrated into the system with the help of the social democratic leadership, trying to get the most out of this agreement. He clearly saw that the situation could not be stabilized if the government followed a policy of rigid repudiation of the working class. At the same time he also sized up the importance of the MSzDP's international relations for the regime.

The leadership of the party, on its part, tried to create suitable conditions for a rapprochement. They endeavoured to pacify the workers who, recovering from their initial stupor after the counter-revolution, started their economic struggle. In 1921 the miners of twenty-two mining areas went on strike. In the metal industry, during the same year, there were sixty-eight demonstrations for better wages. Cobblers, building workers and printers also went on strike.

The two attempts of Charles IV to return to the throne during 1921 were critical moments for the government. In both cases the MSzDP was on the side of the government.⁹ It also supported the government in the territorial disputes regarding the town of Pécs and its surroundings and during the Burgenland incident.¹⁰

These gestures were appreciated by the government.

It was in this situation of "détente" that the negotiations between the MSzDP leadership and the Bethlen government began at the end of 1921. As a result of the negotiations, an agreement was concluded, which subsequently came to be known as the "Bethlen-Peyer pact".

⁷ PI Archives, fond 654, unit 4/38.

⁸ See Ágnes Szabó's study in this volume.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Pécs and its surroundings were under Serbian occupation. Since the Trianon Peace Treaty declared that these territories belonged to Hungary, in August 1921 Hungarian authorities took over their administration. In Burgenland, awarded to Austria by the Trianon Peace Treaty in the beginning of the year 1921, Hungarian irregular troops were active, attempting to prevent the Austrian annexation of the territory. Both these events were accompanied by internal and international political tensions.

In the pact, the MSzDP pledged to identify itself with the interests of the counter-revolutionary regime and to take part "with full strength and self-sacrifice in the consolidation". The party was not to carry on with any propaganda which would disrupt the activity of the government and it was to abstain from the struggle for the republic. It was to put its international connections at the service of the regime's foreign political goals. It was to give up organizational work amongst public employees (railway and post office workers) and give up propaganda amongst agricultural workers. The government pledged not to hinder the normal activity of the MSzDP and the trade unions (this meant that meetings could be held under the supervision of the authorities), to reduce the number of those held in internment camps and release the prisoners for whom the MSzDP would assume responsibility.¹¹ In signing the pact, the leadership of the MSzDP undertook obligations that greatly harmed the interests of the working class. The pact was resolutely condemned by the social democrats in exile (including the right wing led by Garami) and by the Executive Committee of the Second International.

Nevertheless the pact also had some positive effect on the further activity of the MSzDP. The agreement made the reorganization of the party possible and assured it some – even if limited – freedom of movement. Persecution of the party by the authorities was reduced and it became possible for the party to elect members to parliament and to some local councils.

The pact was kept secret. This fact provided the government with the possibility of politically blackmailing the MSzDP, because the contents of the pact did not compromise the government, but it did compromise Peyer and his followers before their own rank and file and the international labour movement.

The MSzDP and the Working Class in the Twenties

In order to approach correctly the place of the MSzDP in history, it is necessary to examine the social and political situation of the class itself which was legally represented by this party, and the extent to which the party enjoyed the support and embodied the interests of that class.

In the years succeeding the First World War, Hungary presented the image of a slowly developing agrarian-industrial society. The largest section of the population was the agrarian proletariat: landless peasants or agrarian labourers who owned only one or two holds (1.42 acres) of land. According to the 1920 national census, 462,000 workers, including miners and farm workers, were employed in industry. Artisans, employing one or two workers, were a socially important strata because their living and working conditions were similar to those of the workers. They numbered about 200,000.¹² Approximately the same number was employed in trade, transport and in the public services.

As for real incomes and social conditions, Hungary was among the most underdeveloped countries of Europe. Real incomes were one third of those of the developed countries (England, Switzerland, Sweden) and were barely higher than

¹¹ PI Archives, fond 654, unit 4/38.

¹² The 1920 National Census. Magyar Statisztikai Hivatal (Hungarian Statistical Office), part II, p. 31, Budapest, 1926.

in Spain, Portugal and Greece. Labour legislation was almost nonexistent. There was no act regulating working hours. The 9–10 hour work-day was general and no paid holidays were guaranteed. The government constantly rejected the trade unions' demand for state unemployment benefits. Health service was reinstituted only as late as 1927 and even then with conditions unfavourable to the workers. Housing conditions were extremely serious.

There were considerable differences between the various sections of the working class as to social situation, political maturity and cultural development. Wage differentials in Hungarian industries were considerable. There were some privileged categories of workers (first of all printers) whose wages and other benefits were higher than the average. The workers in textile, building material and food industries were at the lower end of this wage scale.

The war and revolutions were followed by an economic crisis. This was partly a consequence of the difficulties arising from the switch over from a war to a peace economy and partly because of the Trianon Peace Treaty. As a result of the latter, Hungary lost more than two thirds of her territory. The country's economic structure disintegrated. The inflation, that had set in during the war, took on catastrophic dimensions. The number of unemployed workers rose to over one hundred thousand. The living standards of the working class reached rock bottom.

This situation coincided with the white terror and with the peak of the political offensive against the working class. The first to be fired from the factories were those who had played an active part in the struggles of the Republic of Councils. Those who were politically labelled had poor prospects of obtaining employment. Due to the hopelessness of the situation tens of thousands of workers left the country to make a better living in France, Belgium, Canada, Brazil and in the Argentine. Emigration reached mass proportions, especially of those, who were most valuable to the working-class movement. The vacuum left by the emigrants was filled by new workers coming from the politically immature peasantry. After the defeat of the Republic of Councils thousands of people were put into internment camps and tens of thousands placed under police surveillance. The terror first of all hit the communists. Once caught, they faced the gallows. Ottó Korvin, People's Commissar for Home Affairs of the Republic of Councils and party militants like Gábor Mészáros, Árpád Kerekes, Jenő László were executed. A fierce man-hunt was on for the communists in hiding.

It was while suffering great losses that the Hungarian working class and its movement started, under the conditions of fascism, the struggle for the preservation of its remaining rights and for the improvement of its living conditions. The unions continued to be the most important mass organizations of the working class. The fascist regime had been unable to liquidate them essentially for the same reasons which guaranteed the legality of the social democratic party. The trade unions, just as before the war, were closely intertwined with the party and to join the unions, automatically meant becoming a member of the MSzDP. Thus the growth of the trade unions reflected the organizational strength of the MSzDP as well, though the two did not exactly correspond because the party also had local branches independent of the trade unions.

At the beginning of the 20s the trade unions had about 200,000 members. In 1922 the strongest were the trade unions of the iron and metal workers with

49,601, the building workers with 18,541, the miners with 18,302, wood workers with 15,925, cobblers with 11,212, printers with 7,347 and the tailors with 7,266 members.¹³ If we compare these membership figures to the number of workers employed in these industries we have to conclude that the printers were the best organized. They were followed by the cobblers, tailors and wood workers; in Budapest and its vicinity, they were practically 100 per cent organized and 40–50 per cent so in the provinces. The ratio was similar among the metal workers, building workers and miners. There were strong organizations in some industries which employed only few workers (e.g., goldsmiths and furriers).¹⁴

Naturally, there were also sections badly or hardly at all organized. During the whole period of the counter-revolutionary regime railwaymen, post office workers, tobacco factory workers were unorganized; the number of organized workers in the textile and chemical industries was insignificant as well as among the numerically very large navvies. The rate of organization was very low among unskilled and semi-skilled industrial workers. The reason for this has to be sought in the pre-war traditions of the working-class movement and in the Bethlen-Peyer pact. The government forbade the party to organize the transport workers, postal workers, state employees (workers in the tobacco factories were included in this latter category) and navvies. Textile and chemical industries were underdeveloped before the war and started flourishing only afterwards. The movement had no traditions in these industries.

The number of trade union members was both relatively and absolutely higher in Budapest and its vicinity than in other industrial centres. Budapest and its suburbs had a determining role in the Hungarian working-class movement. At the beginning of the 20s more than 50 per cent of industrial workers lived there. This was politically and professionally the most highly qualified, most cultured section of the Hungarian proletariat. Conditions for organization were more favourable in the capital than in the countryside.

Therefore the social democratic movement was rooted primarily among the skilled workers of the capital and some larger industrial centres of the provinces (Győr, Miskolc, Pécs). The fact that the working-class movement relied mainly on the skilled workers, that is, on the trained and cultured élite of the working class, had both its positive and negative consequences. It was positive because this strata enjoyed noteworthy prestige among other categories of workers. In wage struggles and strikes it was an advantage to be led by the old guard of the industrial workers and those who held key jobs in production. At the same time this also promoted reformist tendencies, bred craft arrogance and separatist strivings.

The accession to power of the counter-revolution had a varied impact on the working class. The terror frightened many people and induced them to give up political activity. There were some who drew the conclusion from the defeat of the Republic of Councils that it was useless to fight for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie since it was stronger. Others, especially among the unskilled and less cultured workers came under the influence of the religious, nationalist, anti-semitic propaganda of the counter-revolution, which never completely relinquished

¹³ "A magyarországi szakszervezetek számokban" (Hungarian Trade Unions, a Numerical Breakdown), *Szakszervezeti Értéslő*, June 1923.

¹⁴ PI Archives, fonds 666–672.

the idea of winning over at least a part of the working class to its side. The keynote of its propaganda was to emphasize the "common Hungarian fate". It claimed that the interest of the workers coincided with the interests of the "other sections of the nation" since the statutes of the Trianon Peace Treaty "strike employees just as hard as employers".

It has to be noted, however, that these attempts met with relatively little result. Those labour organizations, which were favoured and richly provided with money by the government, were unable to gain mass support at the end of the 30s. This was primarily due to the openly anti-labour social policies of the ruling circles. A regime which turns down consistently even the most moderate of social demands, even those raised by the Christian Socialist Trade Union, which supported the regime, cannot expect lasting success among the workers. A contributing factor to this failure was that the government lacked adequate personnel in this field. The men who undertook to lead the labour organizations loyal to the regime were mostly of ruling class origin and the language, mentality, moods and living conditions of the workers were alien to them.

The consciousness of the basic masses of the workers is determined primarily by their class situation. The existence of the Republic of Councils proved that capitalism could be overthrown. The proletarian power had been an unforgettable experience for a whole generation. And at the same time the white terror crudely demonstrated the anti-proletarian character of bourgeois class rule. Consequently, the overwhelming majority of the working class was resolutely opposed to the counter-revolution and lined up behind the most left-wing force in official political life, behind the Social Democratic Party.

However, this was just a general framework, inside which quite a few trends appeared. Sooner or later these had to crystallize. They organized themselves into groups and presented separate political platforms. Some of them broke with the MSzDP, criticizing it from left- or right-wing standpoints.

The first right-wing group to break away from the MSzDP was led by Sándor Csizmadia. Sándor Csizmadia started as an agricultural worker who had some literary and poetic talent. At a relatively young age he became a member of the editorial board of *Népszava*, and played an important role at the beginning of the century in the development of proletarian culture. He even enjoyed some popularity as a leader of the Association of Agricultural Labourers. Csizmadia and his group switched over to "a national standpoint", broke with the MSzDP and openly backed the government.

A similar event took place in the Miners' Union. Its leader, Vendel Csóka, found himself opposed to the leadership of the party in the mid-20s. The real divergency was not of a political nature; the trade union accused Csóka of embezzlement. After having been expelled from the party and the trade union in 1926, he made use of his personal influence among the miners to start a "yellow" trade union. His organization received regular subsidies from the government. Nevertheless it lost its influence within a few years.¹⁵

But far more important than these events were the struggles waged in the 1920s by the organized workers from leftist positions against the opportunism and the

¹⁵ Public Archives of Pécs, reports of the Lord-Lieutenant of Baranya county, 1929/204.

policy of political submission of the Peyerist leadership. These struggles also appeared in different ideological forms.

We have already pointed out that a portion of the pre-war party leadership, who took an active part in the struggles of the Republic of Councils, emigrated to Austria to escape from the white terror and established an organization under the name of *Világosság*, led by professor Zsigmond Kunfi. He was born in 1879 and had been a member of the MSzDP leadership since 1907. He was an erudite man, a politician of broad outlook who had already been considered before the war to be the best theoretician of the party. During the Republic of Councils, he was People's Commissar for Public Education. Another significant personality of the group was Vilmos Böhm, a technician, Commissar of War and later Ambassador in Vienna representing the Republic of Councils.

The *Világosság*-group had close relations with the Austrian Social Democratic Party and had a great influence within the Socialist Workers' International as well. Ideologically they were opposed to communism and rejected the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat. However, besides many other problems, they differed from the leadership at home in a very important question: they considered the reformation of the Horthy regime impossible, the conclusion of all kinds of pacts with it unpardonable and advocated a consistent struggle aimed at its subversion. They utilized their relations with Western social democratic statesmen for undermining the foreign political activity of the regime.

For the leaders at home the activity of the group was extremely unpleasant, since the emigrés – besides their frequent open attacks – discredited their policy of "loyalty" towards the regime and prevented them from fulfilling the obligation, undertaken in the 1921 pact, to support the government's revisionist foreign policy. Nevertheless, they could not completely break with the group. The *Világosság*-group was a force to be reckoned with in the International, a domain important to the party leadership. They clearly saw that whether their position in the International strengthened or worsened depended on Kunfi and his followers. The world reputation of the MSzDP depended largely on what was written about it in the *Arbeiter Zeitung*, the Austrian party daily, which considered Kunfi and Böhm as competent sources of information. Because of this, the party leaders chose to manoeuvre with the group instead of breaking with them or openly declaring war on them.

The *Világosság*-group had significant influence in Hungary too, especially among the old party members. They held important posts in some of the strongest trade unions such as that of the printers, metal workers and building trade workers.

When outlining the forces of opposition within the MSzDP mention has to be made of the communist opposition. The members of the banned KMP who stayed at home, mostly enrolled in the MSzDP and in the trade unions. They knew they would meet conscious workers more easily here; it would be here that they could carry on effective propaganda and train people who could subsequently be involved in underground activity. It followed from this that they could not reveal their ideas which would have been dangerous because of the presence of police agents and because they would have been expelled by the social democratic leaders. However, this did not mean that they were inactive, or obedient executors of the Peyerist policy or were patient observers of events. On the contrary, they took

part in all the actions aimed at forcing the party leadership toward consistent class struggle and they led all movements of the left-wing opposition. In the beginning of the 20s, they won important positions amongst the leather-workers, wood-workers and building trades workers. They endeavoured to coordinate their actions with the activity of other left-wing groups. The central figure of the communist opposition was István Vági, construction worker. Vági, born in 1883, took part in the trade union movement from his early youth. He became a full time trade unionist already before the war. During the Republic of Councils he was the political commissar of the construction workers' battalion of the Red Army. After the defeat of the Republic of Councils he was secretary of the social democratic party organizations first in the town of Győr, and then in Pécs. He made contact with the illegal KMP in 1923 and subsequently his activity was conducted under the party's guidance.

The activity of the various left-wing opposition groups increased by the mid-20s. Although the leadership kept the Bethlen-Peyer pact secret from the membership, knowledge of its contents slowly spread all over the country. Through the *Világosság*-group in Vienna, the KMP became acquainted with its main points and made them known to the social democratic workers at home. The opposition, critical of the defensive policy of the leadership and its compromises with the regime, became more insistent. The party leadership not only rejected this criticism but started to expel the leaders of the left-wing opposition. Police authorities dealt with the expelled members as communists and the expulsion was accompanied by police surveillance, internment and dismissal from jobs. The leaders of some large trade unions, such as those of the construction workers and cobblers, were expelled. Large numbers of workers, who sympathized with their leaders, left the party and the trade unions. The people who were expelled or who left the MSzDP founded a new party, the Socialist Workers' Party of Hungary (MSzMP) which was sympathizing with and was guided by the communists, with István Vági as its secretary. As result of the expulsions and resignations, by 1926 the number of trade union members dropped to half of what it was in 1922.¹⁶

The process of differentiation within the MSzDP naturally enough was not simply a result of subjective factors (i.e., the policy of the leadership). It expressed the processes taking place within the working class itself at the time. After the defeat of the Republic of Councils the working class as a whole was politically crippled. Initially, the basic reflexes of self-defence drove into the background the problems arising from the differences between the various strata of the workers. To the extent that the political consolidation advanced, that the working-class movement gained more freedom of action and the fetters were shaken off to that extent did these problems rise to the surface.

As has already been stated, the skilled workers and mostly the highly skilled workers, made up the main base of the MSzDP. When formulating policy, the party leadership first of all took into account the direct goals of this sector. Worthy of mention, though not a decisive factor, is that all the leaders originated from this group. These aims could be summarized as follows: struggle for reforms aimed at democratizing the regime and at improving the economic situation of the workers.

¹⁶ "A magyar szakszervezetek létszáma 1926-ban" (The Numerical Strength of the Hungarian Trade Unions in 1926), *Szakszervezeti Értesítő*, June 1927. See Ágnes Szabó's study.

Amidst the given conditions these demands included the suspension of the state of emergency (censorship and internment) the codification of universal suffrage, the right to use secret ballots, the ensurance of the normal functioning of parliament, the reduction of prices and the establishment of progressive taxation. In addition to the above mentioned strata, the party could also win the support of significant groups of the petty-bourgeoisie for these demands.

The reformist conception, however, did not adequately express the needs and demands of the majority of the working class, which was deprived of all rights, poverty stricken and living in intolerable conditions. These included miners, agrarian workers,¹⁷ workers (mainly women) employed in textile, chemical and food industries, unskilled and semi-skilled workers and the majority of skilled workers employed in the small and medium-sized factories. The vague perspectives offered by the slow reforms did not attract these masses, did not express their desires. This does not mean that at that time these workers were uniformly to the left of the MSzDP. It is a well-known fact that low standards of living and the concomitant low cultural level delay the development of class consciousness rather than facilitate it. They were characterized partly by political indifference and partly by spontaneous radicalism. This is not refuted by the fact that those who had suffrage voted for the MSzDP in the 1922 elections, because there was no other working class party to vote for. These masses, on account of their economic conditions and direct interests, were the potential reserve of revolutionary politics. Amidst more favourable conditions they might have found their way to the communist party. Under the conditions of the Hungarian fascist regime they only reached the point of rejecting social democratic reformism – but had no possibility of taking the next step, that of supporting revolutionary policies.

Nevertheless, they did reach the stage of rejecting the MSzDP and peculiarly enough, it was the party leadership itself that led them to do so. A good example of this was the policy of the party leadership with regard to the economic struggle. The trade unions were earnest about safeguarding the interest of the rank and file and employed all forms of economic struggles to that end. Strikes were not the only form of struggle, wage increase could often be obtained through negotiations. But if there was no other way, they were not averse to stopping work – and at such times they proved their power by strong, large-scale and well-organized actions.¹⁸ But such struggles took place exclusively in the well-organized trades. The unions did not undertake to defend the interests of the poorly organized sections of the working class. If workers went on strike in a factory where the majority of the workers was not organized, they did not try to organize them, they would not give material support under the pretext that they could not spend the trade union's money on unorganized workers. Of course, this "bookkeepers' " view of the class struggle did not make a favourable impression on the workers.

¹⁷ In the first half of the 20s, the monthly wage of a miner was one third, and that of an agrarian worker one sixth of the wage of an average skilled factory worker in Budapest.

¹⁸ In March 1922, 12,000 metal workers went on strike in Budapest and its environs against the decreasing standard of living due to inflation. Since the results were soon absorbed by further inflation, in the August of the same year as many as 40,000 workers stopped work. In March 1923, the metal workers went on a national strike again. Simultaneously, struggles for better wages were waged by miners in Salgótarján and Pécs and by cobblers and building workers in Budapest.

What we have described above must not be taken as absolute. Boundaries between the individual sections of workers were not drawn with geometric precision, and there were instances in the history of the MSzDP which were exceptions to the general trend. But this was the main trend and the party was becoming more and more alienated from the lower strata of the working class and getting closer to the petty-bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie.

This tendency was also expressed in the votes received by the MSzDP at the elections. It should be mentioned in advance that the Election Act of 1922 (it was the first time that the MSzDP ran candidates in the elections) created one of the most anti-democratic electoral systems in Europe. The majority of the voters voted openly in the presence of the representatives of the local authorities and the gendarmerie; brutal reprisals faced those who voted for the opposition. The number of the enfranchised was small, hardly one third of the adult population. The communist party was in illegality and, naturally, could not participate in the elections.

The 1922 Election Act, and all the electoral acts later adopted, made an exception of Budapest, its industrial suburbs and some country towns so as to mislead public opinion in the West and maintain the "democratic" pretense and, therefore, voting was by secret ballot. Thus the votes cast here reflected the moods of the masses, though account has to be taken of the great difference between the governments and the MSzDP's financial and propaganda possibilities. Since the number of towns with secret ballot changed from one election to another, in the following we are only going to analyze the votes of those constituencies where throughout the existence of the regime elections were held secretly. We should add that there was practically no relation between the number of votes cast and the number of seats allocated. To elect a candidate, the opposition had to receive five to eight times as many votes as the government party.

The comparison of the 1922 and 1926 elections shows the following results:¹⁹

	Total number		Number of votes for the MSzDP		The MSzDP's percentage of total votes cast	
	1922	1926	1922	1926	1922	1926
Budapest	304,095	221,394	121,789	59,293	40.3	26.8
Budapest's surroundings	81,332	63,250	45,829	22,122	56.3	34.9
Győr	10,055	12,551	5,198	4,298	51.9	34.2
Pécs	10,558	11,789	5,514	5,216	52.5	44.2
Miskolc	9,153	13,500	5,740	4,137	62.7	30.6
Szeged	10,133	23,324	5,365	5,913	53.1	25.3
Debrecen	10,858	21,359	6,254	4,690	60.4	21.9
Hódmezővásárhely	5,840	9,179	3,067	2,251	52.5	24.6

This table shows that in 1922, the MSzDP practically got all of the votes of the working class, and of large sections of the petty-bourgeoisie as well. Although it is impossible to show statistically how many workers had the vote, there is no doubt that both in Budapest and in the provinces the number of people who voted for

¹⁹ These figures are from the contemporary press; where we found contradictory data we accepted the figures of *Szocializmus*, the theoretical organ of the MSzDP, as authoritative.

the social democrats was much larger than the number of voting workers. The data of the various constituencies confirm this. In the working-class areas of the Budapest suburbs (Csepel, Újpest, Kispest) the MSzDP got 80 per cent of the votes.

By 1926 the party lost much of its support, especially in the working-class areas (in Budapest and suburbs). The number of its voters did not decrease in the countryside, the decrease in percentage here was due to the modification of the Election Act which allowed more people to vote.²⁰ The relative decrease is significant especially in the working-class districts of Budapest. In the petty-bourgeois districts the results remained more or less at the 1922 level.

In spite of the decrease, the majority of the working class still lined up behind the MSzDP. But the trend – as a result of the previously mentioned factors – was downward.

In the 20s, the party attempted to seek allies in the circles of the radical and liberal bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie. Between 1920 and 1926 it made electoral alliance with those opposition parties which were to be left of the government. These attempts, however, had little result and did more harm than good to the party's position. In Hungary, at the time, the MSzDP was the only mass party which stood for bourgeois democracy. Its political partners were only insignificant splinter parties, built on the personal prestige of individual politicians, whose platforms were vague and contradictory. The alliance with the Democratic Party of Vilmos Vázsonyi is such an example. Vilmos Vázsonyi was a lawyer, a former Minister of Justice in the ultra-reactionary war-time governments, a well known royalist enjoying the confidence of influential financial circles. Vázsonyi started opposing the regime because of the anti-semitic extremism of the terrorist commandos and it was on account of this that he made an alliance with the social democrats, whom, by the way, he greatly despised. The party found a similar ally in the petty-bourgeois party of another lawyer, Károly Rassay. These politicians were backed by the numerically small groups of the Budapest Jewish bourgeoisie and the liberal intelligentsia; while these manoeuvres did not increase the number of voters for the MSzDP, they did unfavourably affect the popularity of the party among the workers.

The MSzDP nevertheless obtained, by virtue of the seats it had won in the various elections, certain positions that cannot be under-estimated. Its members of parliament had personal contact with the leading politicians of the régime, they had the opportunity of obtaining valuable information and looking behind the scenes of power. They had a large representation in the Budapest City Council and in the organs of self-government in some of the country towns. Thus they had their representatives on the board of directors of works, owned by the Budapest Council and other city councils, such as transport, energy supply, public hygiene, etc. They had some influence in the public health-service as well.

It follows from this that the party's financial situation was not bad. Its funds were derived not so much from membership fees, as from the real estate of the unions and from companies owned by the party (savings bank, insurance company, printing office). Larger trade unions not only owned their own headquarters buildings, but also apartment houses and land. Practically all the leaders of

²⁰ See Ágnes Szabó's study.

the party were members of parliament and the salary they received as MP's and their other sources of income ensured them an income that was eight to ten times that of a skilled worker.²¹

The MSzDP during the Years of the Depression

The world economic crisis that broke out in 1929 soon spread to Hungary as well. The prices of agricultural products started to drop as early as 1928 and after 1929 fell rapidly. This struck both the smallholder peasantry and the agricultural proletariat; the former got less money for their produce, the latter got smaller wages and unemployment increased.

The slump in industrial production began in 1930 and reached bottom in 1932. By this time production was about 25 per cent less than in 1929. Naturally, this figure reflects only the general drop in production and the impact of the crisis varied from industry to industry. The textile industry, for example, could even increase production.

The drop in production resulted in large scale unemployment. In industry, the number of unemployed workers reached 240,000, or one third of its employed. But the number of those who had part-time jobs was even larger. The increase in unemployment was used by the employers to bring down wages. The total wages paid out in industry in 1932 was 42.4 per cent less than in 1929, while price indexes only dropped by 14.2 per cent.

The crisis also put an end to the political stabilization of the regime. The monetary position of the country in the international market was shaken. The uneven burden that had to be assumed gave rise to conflicts among the different groups of the ruling classes. Agrarian capital, which was stricken especially hard by the crisis, demanded relief through duty and tax regulations at the expense of industrial and commercial capital. The latter tried to prevent this with the argument that it would effect the financial balance of the country. The government tried to reach a compromise but to no avail. Count István Bethlen's government had to resign in August 1931 after ten years in office, and a new cabinet was formed by Gyula Károlyi. Gyula Károlyi was a politician of poor calibre and his appointment was to be only a temporary solution, with him staying in office until the government could carry out the unpopular austerity measures and steer the economy through the crisis.

During the crisis, there was an upsurge in right-wing opposition to the regime, by officers of gentry origin, civil servants and other middle-class elements who had attained recognition in 1919 for their role in the suppression of the dictatorship of the proletariat but who in the 20s were gradually ousted from power or driven to its periphery. This group had contact with Hitler's party as early as the beginning of the 20s. It was led by Gyula Gömbös, an officer of the general staff during the First World War. He became notorious during the 1918 bourgeois democratic revolution when he had initiated the establishment of the league of counter-revolutionary officers. He played a great part in Horthy's accession to power and for some time he enjoyed Horthy's complete confidence. During the

²¹ PI Archives, fond 658, unit 5/1931/4.

20s he was forced to remain in the background, but later his political career rose once again. In 1928, he became Minister of War. Public opinion considered him as the Hungarian representative of the Hitler-type of fascism.

Anti-fascist forces were weak and divided. The only consistently revolutionary party, the KMP was still illegal and its situation had further deteriorated. The extremely small legal opportunity it had of working through the MSzMP from 1925–1928, had vanished. The leaders of the party were being arrested one after the other. During 1930–1931, the police got at the party's leading body five times consecutively. The hunt for communists was becoming ever more wild. In July 1932 Imre Sallai and Sándor Fürst, two leaders of the Party, were caught. Although world public opinion including such prominent personalities as Thomas Mann, J. Galsworthy, H.G. Wells, Eduard Herriot, demanded the release of the prisoners, the fascist court sentenced them to death and they were executed.

Nevertheless it was the communists who organized the spontaneously developing mass struggle against unemployment, who provided the organizational framework and headed the movement. The first larger demonstration of its kind took place on January 26, 1930 in Budapest. In the spring of 1930 a wave of protests against unemployment swept the provincial towns and villages. Especially violent demonstrations took place in Hódmezővásárhely and Szeged. Demonstrators demanded that public and communal works be launched and unemployment benefits be paid. Clashes became more and more fierce and the police used their weapons more and more often.

As the movement developed, it became inevitable for the MSzDP to work out a policy of struggle against unemployment.

The leaders of the MSzDP maintained that it was the duty of the government to take care of the unemployed. They demanded legislative measures which would ease the misery of the unemployed by taxing the whole of society. They knew very well – in their theoretical articles and speeches they even emphasized it – that unemployment was an inevitable aspect of capitalism which could be eliminated only by a socialist society. But since something had to be done in the meantime, the parliamentary group of the party presented the following demands:

1. Legislation concerning compulsory unemployment insurance. This bill was introduced in the house of representatives by Lajos Kabók on December 10, 1929; social democratic representatives repeatedly attempted, but in vain, to put it on the agenda later on.

2. Legislation on the 48 hour work week. In Hungary, at the time, work hours were subject to "free bargaining" between workers and employers and were regulated only by the collective agreements. As has already been mentioned, the crisis had an uneven effect on the different branches of industry and on the various factories within the same industries. Even in the period of hopeless stagnation, it would sometimes happen that an unexpected order would temporarily increase the need for manpower. Thus, while a number of factories were idle or worked two or three days a week, workers in other factories worked 10–12 hour shifts. Also, it was more profitable to employ fewer workers for longer hours, than to employ larger numbers working shorter hours.

Thus the codification of the eight hour work day would actually have reduced unemployment to some extent. The parliamentary group of the MSzDP continuously kept this issue on the agenda during the years of the crisis.

3. The launching of large-scale public works. The parliamentary group demanded that the date for such necessary state and municipal investments as the Budapest urban planning, a new hospital, a modern bridge across the Danube, flood-control dikes and sewage system, etc. be advanced.

The parliamentary group campaigned for these demands in dozens of speeches, points of order and interpellations. This struggle was, in itself, correct and it expressed on the whole the immediate interests of the workers. At first, however, the party leadership sharply opposed all non-parliamentary ways of struggle, especially mass demonstrations. Their policy remained defensive during the years of the crisis and was confined to partial demands. The recurrent theme of the speeches made by the party's representatives was that the government had to grant unemployment benefits, for otherwise a "catastrophe" might come, a revolution could break out, which the MSzDP would consider as a disaster just as the government would.

From this point of view, the demonstrations led by the communists were regarded as disturbing and harmful events, and the MSzDP handled them with undisguised aversion. "Both the leadership of the MSzDP and the leaders of the trade unions have been doing their utmost for years to control the unemployed so as to prevent the desperation of the breadless, jobless masses from exploding" – Népszava admitted.²² This was a logical extension of their views. The reasoning was that clashes between the working masses and state power only increased tension and therefore limited the possibility of obtaining reforms. "Law and order" clashed with the "pro-order" social democracy and the leaders were faced with a dilemma which could only have bad consequences. However, there are cases when demonstrations cannot be avoided, for example, when the masses insist on demonstrating and objection by the leaders would seriously endanger their prestige. That is also the case when the government questions the real political weight of the party and violates the *modus vivendi*. In the first case the leadership has to prove its militancy to the masses and in the second it has to demonstrate its mass support to the government.

The leadership of the MSzDP did everything in order to appeal to the "common sense" of the ruling circles. In the spring of 1930, it conducted long and fruitless negotiations for unemployment benefits. These talks achieved nothing, the government and the leading capitalist circles rigidly refused even a one per cent increase in the budget allocations. They argued that the introduction of unemployment benefits would be detrimental to work morale; it would encourage truancy "for it is in the Eastern blood of Hungarians that they react improperly to any temptations provided by law. Our people do not like to work".²³

Thus the party leadership found itself in a difficult situation. The obstinate refusal of the government on the one hand and the rising mass movements on the other, forced them to change their tactics. In addition to this, social democratic workers were playing an increasing role in the movement, as their existence was also threatened by unemployment. The local party organizations did not oppose these actions, on the contrary, in some towns (Kispest, Persterzsébet, Győr, Pécs) they actually supported them.

²² "Munkanélküliség a Töreké tanács előtt" (Unemployment Before the Töreké-Council), *Népszava*, August 14, 1930.

²³ OL, Papers of the Ministry of Welfare, bundle 6, 1924–1930.

Influenced by all this, the leadership of the MSzDP also decided to take more resolute steps. In the summer of 1930 they organized mass meetings to discuss the problem of how to fight unemployment. The number of participants at these meetings was higher than ever before (one of the meetings was attended by 25,000 people). The atmosphere was tense. Speakers were often interrupted by people who urged more resolute, more militant policies. A particularly animated meeting was held in Győr (130 kilometres west of Budapest), where participants decided to organize a march to Budapest, to demonstrate their determination. This "hunger march" could be stopped only by army units.

As a consequence of this pressure from below, the leaders of the MSzDP and the trade unions decided to organize in Budapest and other industrial cities a strike accompanied by demonstrations in order to back up the demands of the unemployed. The authorities allowed it on the condition that its organizers would guarantee that it would be a "quiet walk" with no political slogans.

The communist party called on its members and sympathizers to take part in the demonstration, and to turn it into a militant, definitely political demonstration against the regime.²⁴ Simultaneously it took organizational and technical precautions for the success of this plan.

On September 1, 1930 the main streets of Budapest were jammed with about 150,000 demonstrators. The demonstrators clashed with the police within the first fifteen minutes. Soon mounted policemen attacked the demonstrators whose mood became increasingly militant. This was the first time since the defeat of the Republic of Councils that the song of the international labour movement, the "International" was openly sung on the streets. The demonstrators shouted in unison "Down with Horthy! Down with Bethlen! We want work, we want bread!"

Actual street battles developed between the demonstrators and police. In the clashes one worker died and about four hundred were wounded.

Demonstrations spread throughout the country. In Győr there was a general strike and several demonstrators were wounded by the police. Clashes took place in Miskolc, Gyula and Szentes. About 100,000 persons were estimated to have taken part in these demonstrations in provincial towns.

The demonstration on September 1, 1930 was the most important one during the whole Horthy era, both as to size and effect. The quarter of a million people entering the scene of political struggle on this day, definitely expressed their opposition to the counter-revolutionary regime. The demonstration provoked considerable international reaction. Solidarity demonstrations took place in France, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and in the Soviet Union.

For the MSzDP the demonstration was especially important, as it proved that there was an alternative to the increasingly unpopular and frustrating policy of the "most loyal opposition". The party not only had the means of bringing the masses out on the streets but this policy also increased the popularity of the party, its political weight in the life of the country and even improved its bargaining positions with the government.

This alternative was represented in the party first of all by Ernő Garami and Manó Buchinger. Garami, who had left the country at the end of 1919 and had been living in Austria, came back in November 1929 with the permission of the

²⁴ PI Archives, Pamphlet and leaflet collection, III/1/1930/1568.

government. The latter hoped that Garami could be persuaded to put his international connections at the service of the regime. Because of this they forgave him the articles he had written in the 20s in his paper *Jövő*, attacking the regime.

Garami came home with the idea that eventually he would take over the leadership of the party. This seemed logical, both because of his past and his abilities which were far more remarkable than those of the leaders at home. Since he viewed the position and the perspectives of the MSzDP not from the aspect of Horthy's parliament, but from that of international social democracy, he had a clear vision of the disadvantages and probable consequences of the Peyerist policies. Therefore he tried to make the party change its policy.

The essence of his outlook was the following:

The Horthy regime was an anachronism in democratic Europe. It was becoming more and more isolated and would collapse in the near future under internal and international pressures, giving way to a bourgeois democratic regime. The party's duty was not to delay, but, on the contrary, to hasten this collapse. The MSzDP had to undermine the regime, instead of pursuing "constructive collaboration". Until the collapse, the MSzDP had to preserve its political and moral capital and, most of all, its influence on the working class. In order to achieve this aim the party had to clearly dissociate itself from this doomed regime. The prestige of the party was far more important than its temporary positions which were of doubtful value.

Garami especially severely criticized the party's activity in Parliament. He said that the party did not have to mislead the workers into believing that anything could be achieved in Parliament. It should not provide the government with the advantage of appearing democratic because it allowed an "opposition". It was more expedient for the party to boycott the regime, be passive in Parliament and devote a major part of its energies to organizing mass struggles. The party ought to become the acknowledged leader of all democratic forces and join forces with all those who could be relied on. Since Garami was strongly anti-communist, he did not include the communists. He considered them as an enemy, equally dangerous as fascism. By democratic forces he exclusively meant the liberal and petty-bourgeois parties.²⁵

Garami's strategy was not new. In essence he adapted the ideas he had professed in 1919–1920 to the new situation. His position was unquestionably based on an erroneous analysis of the situation. The democratic big powers had no inhibitions about supporting the fascist regimes in Central Europe, just as they tolerated brutal slavery in their colonies, as long as it coincided with their great power interests. Besides this, the forces of democracy were in retreat throughout Europe. But apart from this, passivity in Parliament would not have served the interests of the Hungarian working class and the working class would have even lost the minimal position it had achieved.

Nevertheless, Garami's ideas had their positive features too. He demanded a consistent struggle against the regime and was in favour of mass actions. This played a significant role in the MSzDP's leadership in organizing the demonstration of September 1, after which the question of the party's strategy arose again.

²⁵ PI Archives, fond 657, unit 5/1931/4.

The leadership of the MSzDP was frightened by the size and the character of the demonstration. They had not reckoned on such great masses and, what is more, they had not judged realistically the mood of the masses. They had not thought that blood would be shed, that crowds marching on the street – following the appeal of the communist – would build barricades and set cars on fire. They did not dare to assume the responsibility of following this path. They had not the slightest intention to relinquishing their positions nor of breaking resolutely with the regime. Their only aim was to make use of the events of September 1, in order to increase their influence on the masses, to enhance their prestige with the government and their position in the Socialist Workers' International. This required that the mass movements be contained and that Garami be ousted from the leadership.

The latter task was the easier one and a campaign was launched against Garami within the party. His articles were not published, his speeches were greeted by howls, his proposals were outvoted. Garami recognized his failure and in January 1931 he resigned from the leadership and went into exile again.

Mass movements continued after September 1 as well. Demonstrations took place in Debrecen (March 1931), in Hódmezővásárhely (April 1931), and in December 1931 nearly ten thousand unemployed demanded work and bread in Budapest. These actions, however, were organized by the communists. The MSzDP did everything possible to dissociate itself from the movement of the unemployed. Naturally, this was not done openly. The party kept the unemployment issue on the agenda, *Népszava* continued to publish articles on the subject, even meetings were being held. But caution began to prevail, marches and demonstrations were no longer being organized. The idea began to prevail that the movement of the unemployed was not the affair of that section upon which the party relied. Among the skilled workers the rate of unemployment was, of course, not as high as the average. Their situation was not so hopeless, they had job opportunities. On the other hand, the masses of poor people were of little or no consequence to the MSzDP, since most of them did not even have suffrage. It had even been pointed out by Károly Peyer in connection with an interpellation: "Mister Prime Minister, you are quite mistaken if you think that it is the misery of the unemployed that strengthens the Social Democratic Party. These are not our masses..."²⁶

Therefore, in the years of the crisis, the party continued to follow the defensive policy of surrender elaborated in the early 20s. The main representative of this policy continued to be Károly Peyer. Of course, in the party leadership some changes had taken place, new faces, new names appeared. At the second half of the 20s, Illés Mónus began to play an increasingly important role in the leadership. By profession he was a shoemaker, but soon he became a self-educated intellectual. He was a gifted publicist, a cultured man and an attractive leader, who rose above the unimaginative trade union officials. Politically he held the same views as Peyer, but in a more refined, more gentle way and with greater care for party prestige. It was also in these years that Árpád Szakasits, a building worker and Secretary of the Association of Building Trade Workers became one of the top leaders and later on he was to become the foremost representative of the left

²⁶ *Képviselőházi Napló* (Diary of the House of Representatives), vol. XI, p. 81, 1931.

wing and of the people's front policy within the party. Anna Kéthly, a private office employee, also played an important role; she was the only social democratic woman in Parliament. Manó Buchinger, although of the old guard, joined the leadership again after ten years in exile. He was a good friend of Garami's, and one of his followers, as was Jakab Weltner, the editor of *Népszava*. The appearance of these people on the scene meant a certain improvement in the quality of leadership, though at the moment this was not reflected in the practical policy of the MSzDP.

Social Democracy and the Peasantry

The relationship of the party and the peasantry, numerically the largest strata of society, was of special significance from the point of view of the effectiveness of social democratic policies and of the success of the struggle for democracy.

The agrarian question had long been of decisive importance in the history of Hungarian social democracy but it is not our task to analyze this here.²⁷ We should only like to mention that at the beginning of the century the party had accepted, as applicable to Hungarian conditions, the theories of Kautsky on the agrarian question with no particular changes. The pillar of Kautsky's ideas was the superiority of large-scale over small-scale farming.

This standpoint put the party in a serious dilemma. In Hungary, the bourgeois-democratic revolution never having been completed, the landownership system was burdened by significant feudal remnants. The largest part of the land was owned by the landlords while the majority of the population had no land or were peasants with one or two holds. Land reform was the deepest desire of these three million people. Since the MSzDP would not undertake to struggle for this, the forces fighting for the revolutionary-democratic solution of the land question had started to organize outside of the party already at the beginning of the century.

In the 20s debate began within the party regarding the re-examination of its agrarian policy. The leadership – according to the resolutions of previous congresses – had to work out the party's agrarian programme. There was growing recognition of the need to pull down the wall which had for decades divided workers and peasants and to convert the peasantry from being a reserve for counter-revolution to that of democracy, or at least to make some initial efforts in this direction. Conditions for this, at least potentially, existed. The initial demagoguery carried on by the counter-revolution among the peasants had been unmasked by the mid-20s. The land reform introduced in 1921 had not eased social tensions.²⁸ Simultaneously, the party urgently needed to extend its mass influence and to find a new ally so as to make its struggle for democracy more effective.

Meanwhile, in the circles of international social democracy the agrarian question was also beginning to be treated in a new way. In their agrarian programmes the Western fraternal parties, one after the other, considered the demand for land reform and the distribution of estates as either necessary or ad-

²⁷ See Tibor Erényi's study in this volume.

²⁸ See Ágnes Szabó's study in this volume.

missible. It was first of all the agrarian programme of the German social democrats, made public in 1927, which encouraged the Hungarian party to revise its views.

There was a particular reason for the uncertainty of Hungarian social democracy regarding the agrarian question. While the Hungarian ruling classes more or less tolerated the existence of a moderate social-democratic movement in the cities, they were unwilling to allow such an organization in the villages for a long time. Social tensions were more acute in the villages than in the towns and cities. All movements of the agrarian proletariat were radical from the start and shifted even more to the left. It was more difficult in the villages to contain the movement and to build up an opposition within it and to use subtle means of manipulation. Besides this, the villages were not so much in the spotlight of foreign observers; there was no need there to create the semblance of democracy. The ruling classes could use – and did quite consistently – open, brutal, unmasked terror against the movements. Therefore, all attempts by social democracy to take roots in the villages immediately led to serious conflicts.

Nevertheless, at the end of the 20s it seemed that the administration had changed its original point of view. A decree of the Ministry of the Interior stated that “organizations of the MSzDP may operate without the permission of the authorities”.²⁹ This was motivated by the hope that the appearance of MSzDP organizations would distract the discontent of the peasantry, which at the time was manifested in a series of spontaneous mass movements. The government also hoped that the leaders of the party would manage to keep the movement within the limits of a loyal opposition.

These factors gave impetus to those forces which demanded the revision of the party's peasant policies. The preparation of the agrarian programme, which had been in the making for years, was now accelerated. The draft of the agrarian programme was introduced at the Twenty-seventh Congress of the MSzDP that opened on September 7, 1930. The Congress accepted it after a thorough debate and several amendments.

The programme demanded the expropriation of church lands and related estates without compensation and the division of estates of over 200 holds (with compensation to the proprietors) among landless and poverty stricken peasants except for the model farms which served public aims and other large agricultural plants “serving important interests of production”. It considered it an obligation of the state to compensate the landlords but said nothing about whether or not the peasants would have to pay for the land they received. The division of the landed estates was correctly regarded as key issue of democratic transformation, for in Hungary the strongest base of political reaction were the latifundia. The recognition of this fact showed that the party had discarded the strictly economist approach to the agrarian question.

As a result of the Congress discussion a sentence was included in the programme which, though rather vague, did nevertheless refer to socialism as the ultimate aim of the party.

The agrarian programme was an important document of the struggle for a bourgeois-democratic transformation and it was one of the most positive acts of

²⁹ *Népszava*, January 21, 1930.

the MSzDP between the two wars. The programme on the whole was based on a correct analysis of the economic-social conditions of the country and became an important weapon of the progressive forces. It served as the basis of a new party policy of alliances and a platform which would bring together the workers, the agrarian proletariat and the small peasants under one common flag, the flag of a democratic Hungary. The programme had, of course, its deficiencies, too. One of these was the view that in Hungary – because of underdeveloped capitalist conditions – the struggle had to be waged first of all against feudalism, against the obstacles impeding the development of a capitalism and that in this fight the industrial bourgeoisie could be considered as an ally. Obviously, the programme was non Marxist, non-revolutionary, but of a bourgeois character and was based on the erroneous assumption that the Horthy regime could be converted into a democratic state. Nevertheless, the basic demand, that of dividing the estates of over 200 holds, was definitely correct.³⁰

The agrarian programme gave strong impetus to the organizational activity of the party which began to unfold in 1930. Social democratic party organizations quickly spread in Hungarian villages. Their membership reached even the one thousand mark in some larger communes and market-towns populated by poor peasants.³¹ In the evenings the poor peasants gathered in the party halls and read the *Népszava* together (only one or two copies reached them regularly). On these occasions there were also lively discussions on political events and there was a far more radical mood than in the town party organizations. The economic crisis hit the village even harder than the towns. At its peak about half a million people were without jobs. The peasants expected an immediate solution and they expected it from their newly discovered party. They thought the day of immediate action had come and that the party would immediately tell them what to do to get food and work. The social democratic party organizations became the pivotal point of peasant revolutionism, they united all forces hostile to the regime without regard for the motives behind their radicalism. The communists of the villages, the former prisoners of war in Russia, the militants of the Republic of Councils also gathered here and they were elected to leading posts in several organizations.

As the upheaval was assuming such dimensions, it could be expected that the ruling circles would attempt to suppress the movement, and the government decree permitting organizing met with the resistance of the lower authorities as early as 1930. Deputy prefects, chief constables and especially town clerks and the gendarmerie, embodying local power denounced all opposition movements as “red” from the very start. They were incapable of making fine distinctions and identified the social democratic movement with the communist one, and treated them in the same way. The local authorities made no secret of their violating the laws of the regime. They even boasted of it. The prefect of Csongrád County proudly reported to his superior, the Minister of the Interior: “During the six years I have been in office I have never allowed social democratic meetings.”³² The

³⁰ The agrarian programme of the revolutionary working-class movement was elaborated by the MSzMP in 1926. See Ágnes Szabó's study in this volume.

³¹ PI Archives, fond 651, 2/1932–1–4593.

³² PI Archives, fond 651, 2/1932–4–3658.

prefect of Szolnok County reported that in the township of Karcag they prevented the activity of the MSzDP by intensive police actions. In Mezőtur, the only newspaper vendor who sold the *Népszava*, "is properly watched by the authorities"³³ and these are only two examples.

Count Gyula Károlyi replacing Prime Minister Bethlen was not an expert in the art of manipulation the working-class movement. He regarded the whole movement as a police matter and gave a free hand to the local authorities in the struggle against social democratic organizations. The Minister of the Interior sent out to the counties a circular to the same effect.³⁴

As a result of this circular the hunt for the MSzDP organizations assumed unprecedented scope. Desperate reports arrived at MSzDP headquarters. At harvest time landlords refused to employ labourers belonging to the party although this was their only source of income for a whole year. In some villages members of the party were taken to the gendarmerie and were forced to sign declarations of resignation from the party. Mail addressed to the party organizations was confiscated, elected party officials were kept under arrest without trial.³⁵

The MSzDP wanted to avoid open confrontation with the government. However, the repression of its organizations in the villages at the beginning of 1932 was becoming intolerable. The party had the option of either exposing village organizations to the arbitrary will of the gendarmerie and the prefects or attempting resistance.

The party decided on the latter alternative. *Népszava* printed unusually sharp articles attacking the government. In parliament, social democrat MPs made unprecedentedly courageous speeches. "We call upon the members of our party to defend themselves. We urge them to drive with scythes, hoes and any instruments at hand, these beasts (the gendarmes – Gy.B.) back from the bedrock of "lawlessness," Ferenc Szeder said.³⁶ It was in the spirit of resistance that the party organized a nationwide action for April 7, 1932. On this day, in all areas where there was a party organization, delegations were sent to the local authorities to deliver memorandums of protest. The urban workers also joined the action: printers went on strike and daily papers were not published for two days.

The visits of the delegations changed into militant demonstrations in several villages and towns. In Győr there was a general strike. In Szeged demonstrators were dispersed by mounted police and there were many injured. In Hódmezővásárhely about 5,000 people marched to the County Hall. In Békéscsaba demonstrators clashed with mounted police and seven persons were injured. In Orosháza, which had a population of only 10,000, 1800 people took part in the march. There was bloodshed there too. In two villages inhabited by the agrarian proletariat, Balmazújváros and Nyirtura, two demonstrators died in the clash between the people and the police.

³³ PI Archives, fond 651, 2/1933-4-4059.

³⁴ Archives of Zalaegerszeg. Report of the Lord-Lieutenant of Zala County, 1932/1-105.

³⁵ We find abundant data for these cases in the March 1932 issues of *Népszava*, in the minutes of the spring session of the House of Representatives and in the material of the MSzDP secretariat in the PI Archives.

³⁶ *Képviselőházi Napló*, vol. V., pp. 84-86, 1931.

The action surpassed the expectations of the social democratic leaders who had hoped to keep it peaceful. The party again had to make a choice and either to continue its energetic opposition to the regime, even at the risk of being banned, or to retreat, discontinuing all of its organizational work in the villages which had got off to such a dynamic start and aroused such great hopes. The leaders of the party chose the latter course. In April 1932, during negotiations with the government, they promised not to form new village party organizations and not to carry out propaganda among the peasantry.³⁷ After this agreement, village organizations disintegrated and dissolved within a few months.

To sum up, the village organizations were violently suppressed by the authorities in the second year of their existence. The movement was still then at a very promising stage. If we examine the social composition of the new organizations we find that at the start the party succeeded in winning over the agrarian proletariat and the labourers of the large estate. It had not yet reached the small and middle-holders, although political conditions for this had ripened and the party's programme was attractive to these strata as well.

Later, the MSzDP tried to make indirect contact with the democratic masses of the peasantry, through the Smallholders' Party. This came up against the difficulty in that the Independent Smallholders' Party was not a real democratic peasant party, in fact, it was not a real democratic party at all, but a peculiar, two-faced formation, which gathered within its ranks certain forces of peasant democracy and those circles of the big landowners which differed with the government only on some tactical questions. The Smallholders' Party was led generally by the latter. The MSzDP found an ally in the Smallholders' Party only when Hungary's annexation by Hitler's Germany became an imminent danger.³⁸

The MSzDP in the Years of the International Advance of Fascism

The economic crisis resulted in a regrouping of the class forces within the camp of the ruling classes. In October 1932, a new government was formed by Gyula Gömbös. The aim of Gömbös was to establish a totalitarian fascist dictatorship. This would have meant the liquidation of all the remaining rights of the working class, the introduction of the fascist one-party system, the elimination of all opposition parties and the introduction of the fascist *Führer* principle. Hitler's accession to power in Germany seemed to favour his plans. Gömbös was the first European prime minister to pay a formal visit of respect to Hitler, although the introduction of a onesided German orientation was hampered by the commitments of Hungarian fascism to Italy.

The accession of Gömbös to power coincided with the victory of German fascism, creating a new situation in the Hungarian working-class movement as well. Totalitarian fascism hoped to win over the working class. Gömbös wanted to suppress the Trade Unions. He "sounded the death-knell" over the social democratic party. At the same time, in contrast to his predecessors, he made generous use of social demagoguery. He promised work to the unemployed, decent standards

³⁷ PI Archives, fond 651.1, 2/1933-4-4059.

³⁸ About the Smallholders' Party see István Pintér's study in this volume.

of living and social reforms to the workers. His party, the Party of National Unity, attempted to win the workers over. "I shall not allow the workers to be monopolized by social democracy... I am going to pull down the artificially erected walls separating the social classes", he said. He also planned organizational measures in addition to increasing propaganda activity. He wanted to replace the trade unions by so-called labour chambers. These would have encompassed the workers and employers of individual trades on the model of the Italian corporations in one chamber under the leadership of an appointed "leader". This plan, had it been realized, would have resulted in the trade unions losing all of their former positions. Their property would have been confiscated by the fascist state and the elected shop stewards would have been replaced by fascist agents. The workers would have been deprived of the right to strike. Politically, the new organization would have been subordinated to the fascist party.

These developments in Hungary and abroad created panic amongst the leaders of the MSzDP. The defeat of the mighty and powerful German social democracy was a great shock and it was heightened by the liquidation of the fraternal party of neighbouring Austria in February 1934. These two parties were regarded as the direct political "hinterland" of the MSzDP; in losing them, the party also lost much of its own political weight.

An analysis of the situation led the leadership to the conclusion that since its own forces were too weak to stop this course of events, they had to place themselves under the protection of those circles which opposed, though for reactionary reasons, Gömbös's idea of introducing fascism. They sought these forces in the conservative, Anglophile circles of finance capital and landowners.

This reasoning was not completely unrealistic. In the years 1934-1936, Hungarian finance capital was not interested in an exclusively German orientation. It considered Hitler's regime as unclear and unstable. It hoped to satisfy its territorial aspirations and realize its economic interests primarily through the Anglo-French group and, in the second instance, through Mussolini's Italy. The important circles of the ruling classes watched with anxiety Gömbös's show of friendship towards Germany. They were also disturbed by the social demagoguery of the new leader, as well as by his dictatorial ambitions. Therefore, it was decided that Gömbös, after the country would overcome the worst period of the crisis, would have to be ousted from political leadership. This task was undertaken by Count István Bethlen, who had in 1935 reappeared on the political scene and openly opposed Gömbös. Secretly they were inclined to accept the MSzDP as an ally, as somewhat of a necessary counter-balance to Gömbös's social demagoguery.

For the MSzDP this orientation meant that its tactics and its terminology had to be adapted to the needs of Bethlen's group. It had to confine its demands to the defense of the "liberalism" of the 20s and avoid all overly left-wing manifestations so as not to jeopardize the protection of the conservative circles. Its policy was characterized by the endeavour to safeguard "legality" meticulously and to emphasize its readiness to accept the interests of the "nation". In the meanwhile, of course, it tried to safeguard the legality of the party and the trade unions. Gömbös's planned corporative unions met with the strong resistance of the workers. The economic struggles at the time were accompanied by the demand to defend the trade unions. A united front was formed around this question by social democratic and communist workers which manifested itself with impressive force

during the building trades workers' strike in 1935.³⁹ Finally the project of labour chambers was taken off the agenda, partly because of labour protest and partly because of the general weakening position of Gömbös. In the first half of the 30s, totalitarian fascism could not be introduced.

In the international working-class movement, the idea of an antifascist popular front was spreading during these years. Influential socialist parties – French, Spanish, Italian, Austrian – adopted the idea of the popular front and antifascist unity, some undertook united actions with the communist parties. Hungarian social democracy rigidly rejected the idea of the popular front. This logically followed from the policy of "loyalty", in that, before their reactionary partners, they could not risk the odium of collaborating with the illegal and persecuted communist party.

Nevertheless, it was not easy to reject the popular front policy and the problem was not handled uniformly. In the beginning of 1936, when Gömbös resigned, the pressure on the party eased somewhat. The working-class movement rallied and strikes became more frequent, trade union membership increased.⁴⁰ The successes of the popular front in Spain greatly impressed the members of the party. Workers frequently expressed their solidarity with the struggle of the Spanish people against the Francoist rebels. For several months *Népszava* published extremely courageous antifascist reports from Spain. Its special correspondent made interviews with the leading politicians of the popular front, including some communists. Of the Hungarian press, *Népszava* was the only paper defending the Republic against fascist calumnies.

This policy could not be carried on for long. The fascist press launched a wild campaign against the party and Miklós Kozma, the Minister of the Interior, announced that if *Népszava* continues to carry on propaganda for the struggle of the Spanish Republic the paper would be banned and those "responsible" would be arrested.

As a result of these threats, the party retreated. The Spanish events were given less space in the paper and simultaneously more anti-Soviet material was being published. The paper unreservedly joined the international anti-Soviet campaign being conducted in connection with the "Moscow trials". This change was viewed with satisfaction in government circles.

The retreat of the MSzDP occurred simultaneously with other events which adversely effected the general development of the working-class movement.

It has already been pointed out that Hungarian fascism – following the example of Germany – launched powerful social demagoguery in the beginning of the 30s. The Hungarian ruling circles were not united on this question. The old, traditional ruling circles (finance capital and the landowners) were opposed to all forms of social reforms. But the group of gentries and officials, who played an increasing role in political life and endeavoured to conquer absolute power, understood that in order to achieve its aims it needed a larger mass base. It announced a "reform

³⁹ In July 1935, on the initiative of the communists, about ten thousand construction-workers launched a struggle for wage increases. The slogan of defending the trade unions got particular emphasis.

⁴⁰ During 1936, successful struggles were waged by the building workers, cobblers, tailors and textile workers. The strength of the trade unions increased by 10-15 per cent.

programme" and did, in fact, introduce some measures. In 1936–1937 wage minimums, work hours and paid holidays were set by decrees.⁴¹ These measures had been introduced in most countries of Europe in the years 1918–1920 (even in countries much less developed than Hungary). Nevertheless, this gave the masses the impression that the government was "concerned with them".

This illusion was strengthened by the war boom which began in 1938. On March 5, 1938, Prime Minister Kálmán Darányi announced the Five Year Plan of Hungarian armament, the so called "Győr Programme". The programme provided a thousand million *pengős* for direct and indirect military expenditures. The funds needed to meet this came partly from the single taxation of properties and partly from bank credits.

As a consequence of the programme Hungarian industry served the German military machine and became one of its supplementary sectors. But the direct effect was temporarily positive. It was the first time in the history of capitalist Hungary – except for the war years – that there was almost full employment. The purchasing power of the population increased.

From the second half of the 30s on, Hungary committed herself ever more to Hitler's Germany. The results of this, both in home and in foreign policy, became apparent very soon. On the Hungarian political scene Hitler's agents, the so called arrow-cross movement, made its appearance. Its rabid anti-semitic demagoguery was accompanied by anti-capitalist slogans and this offended the interests of the traditional ruling classes. Therefore the latter tried to force them back with some timid and half-hearted measures. But this was adding fuel to the flames and it made it appear as if the arrow-cross was being "persecuted" and thus a part of the masses concluded that the arrow-cross seriously wanted to fight against capitalism. As a result, the arrow-cross movement spread and for a time influenced large numbers of agricultural labourers and workers.

The changes in the composition of the working class also favoured the growth of fascist influence. The percentage of semi-skilled and unskilled workers increased from 57 per cent in 1913 to 68 per cent in 1936. The vigorous development of the textile industry was accompanied by a corresponding growth in the rate of female labour and its percentage grew from 23 per cent in 1913 to 32 per cent in 1938. The working class, in its majority, consisted of young, unskilled labourers of peasant origin, whose political outlook had been constantly influenced by fascist propaganda.

The revolutionary working-class movement was greatly affected by the changes in Hungary's international relations. As a consequence of the *Anschluss*, Hungary became the neighbour of Hitler's Germany. The Hungarian government was simply becoming a vassal of Hitler. It took part in the repartition of Czechoslovakia and later on the opportunity presented itself for occupying a part of Rumania and Yugoslavia. Owing to the fact that up to the Trianon Peace Treaty these territories had belonged to Hungary, and a large part of the population was Hungarian, the majority of public opinion was enthusiastic about the reannexation of these territories. Nor were the working masses free from the effect of the chauvinistic euphoria permeating the country, because apart from the illegal

⁴¹ Formerly, work hours were subject to "free negotiations between employers and employees". Paid holidays ranged from about six to twelve days a year.

communist party there was no party, nor even a newspaper, to oppose this Hitlerite solution of territorial problems.

As a result of all this, by the end of the 1930s, the legal working-class movement showed a substantial decline. This was reflected in the number of strikers and in the number of trade union members as well as in the number of votes cast for the social democratic party.

It is worthwhile to compare MSzDP election results of 1931, 1935 and 1939.

	Total of votes cast		
	1931	1935	1939
Budapest	237,288	251,665	299,086
Budapest's surroundings	75,434	110,385	154,479
Győr	14,147	16,263	18,566
Pécs	17,352	19,813	18,869
Miskolc	17,147	19,529	15,474
Szeged	29,146	36,496	33,029
Debrecen	25,547	30,877	28,369
Hódmezővásárhely	14,656	16,271	15,167

Votes for the MSzDP			Percentage		
1931	1935	1939	1931	1935	1939
67,514	56,136	34,066	28.8	23.3	11.3
26,023	35,199	26,213	34.6	31.9	17.0
5,282	6,402	4,810	37.3	38.3	35.6
7,822	7,160	3,807	45.3	31.7	20.0
6,979	7,480	3,693	40.7	38.3	24.5
7,033	6,546	2,639	24.1	17.9	7.9
6,588	7,678	4,125	25.7	24.9	14.8
4,411	5,420	3,179	30.0	33.4	21.0

These figures prove that the party preserved its mass base during the years of the economic crisis and, in the main, also during the elections of 1935, under the Gömbös administration. (Though the number of social-democrat mandates decreased.) It is above all the absolute number of votes cast for the party that sheds some light on how the party's influence on the working class developed. The percentages are somewhat misleading, for the electorate was increased in general by groups such as women and the agricultural population which did not represent working class votes.

The 1939 elections, however, also show a catastrophic setback and what is more, in precisely the most important areas of Budapest and other working-class towns. It is true that the 1939 election was held amidst unprecedented terror, thousands of social democrats were deprived of their vote and the finances of the party were more limited than ever. Nevertheless, it was undeniably a defeat. Most painful of all was the advance of the arrow-cross party, which had been altogether insignificant in 1935, and in most working-class districts now got more votes than the social democrats.

An analysis of the reasons for the defeat cannot leave out of consideration the tremendous pressure exerted on the party. The government had put the trade unions under strict control in 1938 when their press was banned and a ministerial commissioner was appointed to control their finances. Under the influence of the prevailing atmosphere, several factories refused to employ organized workers while it was compulsory for their employees to join one of the fascist organizations. The party was also sensitive to the increasing anti-semitic propaganda. In 1938 a law was passed in Hungary which banished citizens of Jewish origin from certain fields of economic and intellectual life and legalized racial discrimination.⁴² Simultaneously an artificially fomented pogrom atmosphere spread over the country. The right wing made vigorous use of the fact that in the leadership of the social democratic party a relatively large number were of Jewish origin. The situation of the party was made even more difficult by the fact that as Nazism advanced it lost the support of such large fraternal parties as the German, Austrian and Czech social democratic parties and remained practically alone in Central Europe.

In addition to all of these reasons, which were objective ones from the point of view of the party, the decline of its mass influence was also due to other, subjective factors. The MSZDP had been following a reformist policy since 1919. This was a long enough period for the basic masses of workers to become disillusioned with its policy and convinced of how futile and frustrating it was. The rank and file had often seen during these twenty years how their leaders cowardly retreated after an apparently revolutionary start and they had observed many instances when brave words had been followed by opportunist deeds. They had witnessed official leaders of the party during these two decades clutching at every opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to the "great aims of the nation" (that is, the policy of territorial revision). All this had a profoundly disillusionary effect on the left-wing sections of the working class. However, for those who were under the influence of the right wing, the MSZDP was nevertheless "too red" and all gestures of good will towards the right wing were fruitless.

The MSZDP was not able to offer the young working-class generation, which had been influenced by two decades of fascist education as well, an attractive new programme which would have met the requirements of the situation. Judged on the basis of its demands at the end of the 30s, the MSZDP was one of the most conservative parties in Hungary. Its reform programme was so modest that most of the bourgeois parties seemed more radical by comparison – at least as to their

⁴² Article No. XV. 1938. "A társadalmi és gazdasági élet egyensúlyának hatályosabb biztosításáról" (On Safeguarding More Efficiently the Balance of Economic and Social Life), *Magyar Törvénytar*, pp. 132–144.

slogans – not to mention the arrow-cross party. And apart from this, demands such as universal suffrage and a secret ballot had become so commonplace, so frequently and hopelessly repeated, so unmindful of the changing situation that to a large portion of the workers the party seemed to be an anachronism, a relic left over from the beginning of the century.

Nevertheless, the party still represented a relatively important force. It was backed by those whose faithfulness, militant past, personal relations and anti-fascist convictions above all bound them to the party. Since it was the only visible, legal representative of anti-fascism, it also gathered within its ranks certain intellectual and petty-bourgeois groups. The skilled elite of the working class remained in the party. Besides this, by the end of the 1930s, mainly as a result of the activity of the young communists, the youth organization of the MSZDP became a significant force.⁴³

The growth of fascist pressure gave rise to two trends in the party. On the one hand an organized nationalist wing appeared and, on the other, the activity of the left wing increased.

The nationalist group was headed by József Takács, an agricultural labourer, the Secretary of the Association of Agricultural Labourers and Ede Bresztovszky, a journalist. Their platform was similar in many ways to that of the Vanczák-Miákits-group in 1919–1920. They urged the party to "adapt itself to the spirit of the age"; to break with internationalism and take a "national" stand. Their concrete demand was that the party change its official name which at the time was "Social Democratic Party of Hungary". This name had been chosen in 1890, when the party was founded, in keeping with the names of the other parties of the Second International. The Takács-Bresztovszky-group demanded that the party call itself "Hungarian Social Democratic Party". This in the given situation would have meant a renunciation of internationalism and dissociating the party from the international movement. In addition to this the group demanded the removal of party leaders of Jewish origin.

This platform, besides the fact that it so glaringly broke with the basic principles of the party, did not serve its purpose, which was to broaden the mass influence of the party. It was obvious that in nationalism and anti-semitism the social democrats could not "compete" with the arrow-cross party. This was not enough to make it more acceptable to the government which was shifting more and more to the right, nor to the German fascists. However, the party would lose those masses which were still following it, exactly because of its antifascism.

The proposal of the Takács-Bresztovszky-group was discussed by the Congress held in 1939. The result was a compromise and the Congress chose the official name of "Social Democratic Party". At the same Congress some leaders of Jewish origin "voluntarily" resigned.

The party continued to seek protection against increasing fascist pressure in a rapprochement with the moderate wing of fascism and emphasized its loyalty towards Horthy as a symbol of its opposition to Hitler. In Parliament, it voted for the militarization programme and demonstrated its support for the reannexation of former Hungarian territories. It did all this hoping that the government would appreciate its loyalty and, despite German pressure, would not ban the party.

⁴³ See I. Pintér's study in this volume.

Simultaneously, the left-wing forces, which were demanding a counter-attack against fascism, also increased within the party. Their most outstanding representative was Árpád Szakasits, who was elected first secretary in 1939. *Népszava* was demanding with intensifying vigour that the country's independence be defended against the German threat. The party's organizations repelled arrow-cross provocations with growing resoluteness and unmasked their demagogy. At the cultural evenings organized by the workers' cultural associations the supporters of antifascist unity made speeches more frequently.

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This essay could not undertake to review all aspects of the history of the MSzDP in this complicated period. We have not examined several important aspects of the question. We have not analyzed the party's activity in Parliament and in the municipality of Budapest, nor did we deal with the economic struggles. We have not examined the party's ideological and theoretical line. These are all tasks for a more comprehensive monograph, which is at the moment under preparation.

The effect of the social democratic movement on Hungarian society cannot be measured in figures. Neither the number of trade union members, nor the number of votes cast for the party can properly illustrate what the party had really meant from the point of view of the formation of social consciousness in this period. Its influence reached beyond its sphere of political activity; it reached the domain of ideology, effected cultural life and reached even deeper into the spheres of mass psychology. The experience of taking part in the movement determined the consciousness of a whole generation of workers which rose to the surface after the liberation.

The MSzDP, despite all of its ideological and political limits, was the greatest propagator of progressive ideas in the years of fascism. It was through the social democratic party that the ideas of Marx and Engels reached tens of thousands of people. This was the only organization which professed the ideals of fraternity, internationalism and humanism against the official ideology of chauvinistic warmongering and religious hatred reminiscent of the Middle Ages. It was the party which proclaimed the ideals of peace and liberty during the euphoria of tyranny and the cult of war.

There is no use in denying that at times the party did its work in a subdued, whispering tone. Its leadership did not rise to the occasion and was rarely able to live up to the requirements of the age. History's critique rightfully stresses and puts the spotlight on those instances when the leaders of the MSzDP deviated from the basic ideological, moral and political norms of the working class. However, in the consciousness of that generation of workers, which grew up in this movement, these instances did not seem to be of prime importance. To belong to the party was for them a symbol of class loyalty and it filled their lives with the warmth of class solidarity for it meant courageously fighting against capital, fascism and war. It gave them dignity in a society which wanted to break their backbone and wanted to make them servants or jailors.

The history of the MSzDP is above all theirs, it is the history of the struggles waged by these workers in the dark years of fascism for more rights, and for a larger piece of bread. And that is why posterity will remember it as an important part of Hungarian history.

The Major Features of the Alliance Policy of the Hungarian Party of Communists between 1936 and 1945¹

by

István Pintér

Hitler's rise to power in 1933 and the subsequent forging ahead of fascism on an international scale put the question of class struggle and class alliance in a new way to the communist parties. The historical Seventh Congress of the Communist International (CI) played a decisive role in examining and solving this problem. The congress concluded that the ever increasing conflict of interest between the extreme by reactionary and aggressive policy of finance capital and the whole of the working people is making it possible for the working class to unite the vast majority of the people – the working peasantry, the petty-bourgeoisie and at times even the anti-monopolist section of the bourgeoisie. This can, however, only be achieved on the basis of a united front of the working class. "In mobilizing the working masses for the fight against fascism," stated Dimitrov, the General Secretary of the CI, "it is of particular importance that a broad anti-fascist popular front be created on the basis of a united front of the proletariat. The success of the whole struggle of the proletariat is closely connected with the establishment of a militant alliance of the proletariat with the working peasantry and the urban masses, which even in the industrially developed countries comprise the majority."²

The Congress, however, called attention not only to the allies who could be depended on in the fight against fascism, but also showed the ways and means of involving them in this struggle. It emphasized that the working masses have to be made to realize "where the threatening danger really comes from" and have to be shown whom they can rely upon and how to initiate a successful struggle.

The policy of alliance is the art of relating to the masses. The condition for its practical application was that the current objectives of the party always had to be clear and acceptable to the masses and the methods used to clarify this had to correspond to the political maturity of the masses. It pointed out that the broadening of the alliance between the classes would increase the numbers of those within the camp jointly fighting against fascism who were not of identical views, of classes and strata and who were not fighting for identical interests in all matters. It was of decisive importance therefore, to develop correct methods of

¹ Alliance policy at that time meant a class policy which rallied all social classes and groups involved in the anti-fascist struggle.

² Dimitrov, G.M.: *Válogatott cikkek és beszédek* (Selected Articles and Speeches), p. 72, Szikra, Budapest, 1952.

approach to the masses taking part in the struggle. In former years the prevailing sectarian policy of the communist parties caused the greatest harm precisely in this field, so that it was an extremely important though complex task to overcome this.

The Beginning of an Anti-Fascist Alliance Policy in Hungary

The alliance policy necessitated by the new historical situation became a task of vital importance which had to be solved in Hungary, too. However, in the first half of the 1930s, the strategy and tactics of the Hungarian Party of Communists (KMP) were not appropriate for meeting the changed conditions. One of the main reasons for this was the peculiar situation in the country.

In Hungary, when the European anti-fascist popular front movement began to develop, there had already been for fifteen years a counter-revolutionary fascist regime in power. Following the defeat of the Hungarian Republic of Councils, the white terror and then the legalized terror were a staggering blow to Hungarian democratic and socialist forces and ideals. The Social Democratic Party of Hungary (MSzDP) functioned legally, while the KMP was in dangerous illegality. This circumstance, and the two parties' basic political contradictions, deepened the division between the two parties and also within the working class.

Under the counter-revolutionary system there was no democratic bourgeois or peasant party with which the Communist Party could have established contact. The errors in the party's overall political line were also a barrier to this. Amidst such conditions even when the KMP attempted to expand its circle of allies it did not lead to any lasting results, and, above all, did not lead to the elaboration of an alliance policy corresponding to Hungarian conditions.

Following Hitler's advent to power, at the time when Gyula Gömbös was Prime Minister, efforts had been made in Hungary as well to transform the existing regime on the Nazi model, and to introduce total fascist dictatorship. In the wake of these circumstances, and the search for the right policy, which began in the international working-class movement and primarily in the communist parties, there appeared the first signs in the middle 1930s of a certain slow change in the policy of the KMP, too. This gave new life to the working-class movement and was also felt in a large number of successful economic strikes. There were a number of strikes in 1934 in textile factories, in the food industry, the building trades industry and in the mines which spread throughout the country. The most significant of these was the hunger strike of the miners in Pécs, and the several week-long general building trades workers' strike of August 1935. The change, however, primarily affected certain fields of the party's practical policy and not its main line. On this basis, for example, it fought successfully against certain anti-labour measures of the Gömbös administration which were aimed at liquidating the trade unions, but this was not sufficient to develop a general attack on the measures directed towards introducing total fascism, nor to establish a proper relationship with the MSzDP or other parties, which, from the point of view of the masses they represented, were anti-fascist, [the Independent Small Holders' Party (FKGP), Freedom Party].

The most important task of the leaders of the KMP should have been to analyse the concrete conditions in Hungary in the spirit of the policy formulated at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, and on this basis start to work out the people's front policy of the KMP. At the outset, the party leadership, headed by Béla Kun, was of the opinion that the path pursued by the KMP was fundamentally correct and therefore there was no need to change its policy, but only to modify certain particular details.³

Following the Seventh Congress of the Comintern the majority of the parties had to engage in protracted analytical work so as to elaborate and implement the new policy on alliances. However, the fact that the Central Committee of the KMP did not even consider it necessary to make a comprehensive examination of the changed conditions in Hungary and of the party's policy and set the concrete tasks accordingly, meant that it did not deem it essential to adopt the policy adopted at the Seventh Congress. Some leaders of the KMP were of the opinion that in a country where the socialist revolution had once been victorious as, for example, in Hungary in 1919, a democratic revolution was no longer possible and the unsolved democratic tasks could only be solved within the framework of a socialist revolution. This theoretically erroneous view and, understandably, the practical policy stemming from it, could not promote and in fact was a direct barrier to creating united action on the part of the working class, and particularly to winning those masses of people who rejected the idea of socialist revolution but were willing to support anti-fascist, democratic demands.

It was only after serious internal struggles and upheavals within the KMP, including the recall of the members of the Central Committee, Béla Kun among them, and the appointment of a new leadership that, through the direct theoretical contribution and practical aid of the Executive Committee of Comintern, the party reached, after one and a half to two years, the point of elaborating and making public a Hungarian popular front policy in the form of a program.

The following is a summary of some of the more important theoretical conclusions of this period of search which had such great importance for the alliance policy of the party.

Between 1933 and 1936 the leadership of the KMP had already recognized that proper contact with the anti-fascist masses could only come about as a result of achieving a satisfactory relationship with the working class and its legal party, the MSzDP. They rejected the earlier sectarian view that the MSzDP was "fascism's main support". They understood the importance of the MSzDP as the sole legal working-class party and the fact that the vast majority of the Hungarian working class regarded this party as their own. They correctly concluded that even the politically mature section of the working class saw in the MSzDP that force which took up the fight for the rights of the workers against the ruling classes. Though the majority of its membership attacked the policies of the right-wing social democrat leaders it did not want to break with the party itself. Therefore, these factors could not be ignored when it came to urging unity of action. This is why it was decided that the KMP propose to the MSzDP leadership such unity of action which, if they really wanted cooperation, would be acceptable to them. "We make no other condition for joint action", they stated in a comradely letter to the party

³ PI Archives, fond 500/1, unit 94, unit 189/a.

membership, "than the action be directed against fascism, capitalist exploitation, and war. We do not insist on a written agreement, nor on talks for joint action, nor shall we publicize the agreements we make. We can expect no legal organization under the pressure of fascism to publicly declare itself in favour of the proposals of the KMP, but in the interests of joint struggle, we do insist that the slandering of the KMP and the Soviet Union be stopped."⁴ Later they did not even ask that much of the right-wing leaders but only that they do nothing to prevent the efforts at united action between social democratic and communist workers.⁵

These principles were also the basis of communist activity within the socialist trade unions. The communist Trade-Union Opposition which had been established in the early 1930s was gradually dissolved, after the party leadership called attention to the fact that the role of the communists in the concrete historical situation was not to form a "separate body" within the trade unions but to turn the trade unions into an instrument of class struggle. They stressed that the less class-conscious workers are to be reached through the trade unions. They pointed out that the trade unions had to be the means by which, through organizing economic struggle and anti-fascist actions, these working masses were brought closer to the objectives of the communists. This would lay the foundations for an anti-fascist unity of action by organized and unorganized workers. Only this way can the communists attract the members of the social democratic party and the left-wing functionaries of the MSzDP who want cooperation. Only on the basis of such a policy could there be a successful struggle for unity of action, for the realization of an anti-fascist popular front policy. These were the ideas raised by many KMP appeals.

However, a longer period was needed for working out a militant policy for which the KMP could win the cooperation of all the anti-fascist forces in addition to the working class.

By the end of 1935 there was no longer any debate within the party as to whether in the struggle against war and fascism, democratic demands (universal suffrage and secret ballot unrestricted right to strike, freedom of association, assembly and press, land reform, knocking down the prices of the cartels, reducing taxes, stopping the war policy) had to be given prominence. However, only later was clarification reached on the fact that these were demands not for the socialist, but for a democratic revolution. The reason for this has to be sought not only in the insistence of the KMP leadership on the strategy of a direct fight for a new republic of councils, but also in the fact that this issue was not debated in such definite form at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern either. This became a central problem only within the Spanish Popular Front, and particularly in the Spanish civil war, while at the same time it showed the method and way of a solution on an international scale. The Hungarian communists, by issuing the slogan "for a democratic republic" in the summer of 1936 and elaborating the content of this slogan, essentially formulated the correct viewpoint in this question, in keeping with the situation of the country.

In March 1937, just on the anniversary of the Hungarian Republic of Councils, it was stated for the first time that the current fight in Hungary was not for the

⁴ PI Archives, fond 500/2, unit 583.

⁵ PI Archives, fond 500/1, unit 197.

dictatorship of the proletariat but for a democratic Hungary. "Our task, the task of the party of communism, is to organize and lead the struggle of the entire working people against oppression, exploitation and the denial of human rights", wrote the magazine *Sarló és Kalapács*, appearing in Moscow. "Broad sections of the Hungarian people are ready to take up the fight for democracy against fascism, but they are not yet willing to fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is of vital importance to the whole Hungarian people that these forces be united. Today the entire working people can be gathered into a unified, powerful, invincible democratic front under the leadership of the working class only around the militant objectives of a democratic Hungary."⁶

In connection with the unsolved tasks of the 1848 war of independence and the 1918 bourgeois democratic revolution, the article stated: at present in Hungary, in contrast with many other European countries, the struggle is not only and not primarily for regaining democratic rights and for defending democracy, but rather for winning full democracy. Precisely for this reason the militant objective of a democratic Hungary "directly merges the fight of the Hungarian people against feudal remnants in economics and politics, the latifundia and the Hungary of the landlords, with the fight against the advance of fascism, which in the service of the latifundia, the banks, and cartels, would completely subjugate the Hungarian workers and drive them into slavery ..."

Barely a month later, the new central organ of the KMP, the *Dolgozók Lapja* also pointed out that the party's new line was the struggle for a "democratic Hungary". However, the demand for a democratic Hungary did not simply mean a repetition of the 1918 October revolution, but rather the desire to go beyond that. József Révai, one of the theoreticians of the KMP, in a study entitled "Marxizmus, népiesség, magyarság" (Marxism, Populism, Hungarianism), which appeared at that time, wrote that the party was striving to attain such a new type of democratic revolution which, as to its achievements would exceed the traditional bounds of bourgeois democracy and would curtail the political and economic power of monopoly capital too.

The drive toward a democratic, anti-fascist revolution, and the elaboration of a policy of cooperation against fascism necessitated an analysis of class relations in Hungary, and raised the question of "with whom". The MSzMP could not openly reject the anti-fascist people's front policy which had been successfully applied in many countries, above all because of the successes of the anti-fascist movements in Western capitalist countries and the demands of the class-conscious masses of the Hungarian working class. It accepted its justification in general and in principle, but did not consider it applicable to Hungarian conditions. Its main objection was that in Hungary the working class had no satisfactory partner for an eventual popular front movement. The groups of progressive anti-fascist intelligentsia, among them the "populist writers", some of whom dealt primarily with the problems of the poor peasantry, denied the historical role of the working class following the defeat of the 1919 socialist revolution, and saw the peasantry as the main force in the fight against fascism. It was also important to clarify the question of

⁶ "Magyarországi proletárdiktatúra 18. évfordulója és a demokráciáért vívott harc" (The Eighteenth Anniversary of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in Hungary and the Battle for Democracy), *Sarló és Kalapács*, March 1, 1937.

"with whom" because, for a long time, the KMP, in its struggles for a new dictatorship of the proletariat, had in fact narrowed down to the poor peasants the circle of allies who could be included in the struggles.

The Objective and Subjective Conditions for an Anti-Fascist Alliance Policy

After the turn in the KMP's policy, the communist theoreticians began to analyse the changes which had taken place in Hungarian society. Articles on Hungarian social conditions appeared in the *Dolgozók Lapja*, in the *Gondolat*, the theoretical and cultural magazine of the party, as well as in the *Szabad Szó*, then in the *Úzenet*, both published in Paris, as well as in the Hungarian language communist press of neighbouring countries: *Korunk* in Rumania, the *Magyar Lap* in Czechoslovakia. These articles served as the basis for the formulation of the party's new alliance policy. Later, comprehensive studies, serving a similar aim, were prepared on a number of problems and appeared in the theoretical magazine *Új Hang*, which was published in Moscow after 1938. These works were an effort at analysing the situation of the past one hundred years. This was particularly important from the point of view of the alliance policy, the democratic transformation and the defence of the country's independence. This provided significant help for the elaboration of an anti-fascist popular front policy and for its practical application. It was from these analyses that the Hungarian communists drew the conclusion that in Hungary, too, the objective conditions were present for creating a popular front movement and an alliance policy with a wide social base.

This is borne out by a statistical survey of the social cross-section of the country. The working class comprised one fourth of the population of the country, the working peasantry nearly a half and the urban petty-bourgeoisie and intelligentsia numbered almost one million. According to the 1930 census, about 23.5 per cent of the total population was the working class, over 20 per cent were of the agrarian proletariat and the working peasantry – owning from 0.1 to 25 holds (1 h = 1.42 acres) of land – came to 28 per cent, the rich peasants to about three and one half per cent, the urban petty bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia, civil servants and pensioners together made up 15 to 16.5 per cent.

The conditions of the working masses, accounting for nearly two thirds of the country's population, had changed little following the great world economic crisis, and in fact their political rights had been further restricted and their material situation continued to deteriorate. The continued large scale unemployment, the insecurity of the small rural farms and the hundreds of thousands of the urban low-income groups together with the intelligentsia, which was declassed and without perspective, had created an objective interest in the democratization of the country's economic and political life, and in the liquidation of the fascist regime. However, only the most conscious of these social classes and strata saw that the only way out was through struggle against fascism and for a democratic transformation. The majority wanted change at any price and by any means. This meant that they could equally have become the reserve for democratic or extreme fascist forces. The problem was which trend could appeal more directly to the

masses: fascism which manoeuvred with social demagoguery but sought to oppress the masses even more, or the democratic trend which truly wanted to solve the problems. The fascists were in an advantageous position because they were granted all legal opportunities by the regime. At the same time the left-wing democratic forces struggled against the odds of division in their ranks, the illegality of the KMP having some others searching for the right path and others having feelings of loyalty to the government.

The KMP made a detailed examination of the existing social relations and followed with close attention the analyses and conclusions prepared by the different democratic groups. This played an important part in enabling the party to give a proper foundation for the worker-peasant alliance and its relationship with the anti-fascist parties according to the requirements of the popular front policy. It was most important that the agricultural programme of the communist party should serve the interests of the vast majority of the peasantry, and that the party's agrarian policy dispel all lack of confidence in the working class and its revolutionary party.

The KMP, on the basis of an analysis of agrarian relations and historical experience, concluded that a people's front policy was inconceivable without winning the majority of the peasantry. "One of the most important and most bitter lessons of Hungary's whole history is that the struggle of the Hungarian people for liberty and for land, has always been defeated because it was possible to turn the working people of the villages against the city workers! This has always benefited those who exploited and oppressed the working people of both the village and city."⁷

Therefore, the struggle against fascism, for the defence and extension of existing democratic rights and the establishment of a democratic Hungary was condemned to failure at the start if it could not succeed in rallying the working people of the villages to the side of the working class. This was the requirement which had to serve as a guide line in party decisions, and in every action against fascism. *It is for this reason that the fight for democracy, liberty and land could not be waged separately but together and simultaneously.* It was very important to clarify this in face of the views of some social democratic leaders and democratic-minded peasant politicians that "this battle must be continued together and simultaneously in such a way that the workers, the urban working masses should not regard the land question as a "village problem" but rather as precisely that kind of general national question which is of interest to all working people just like the question of democratic civil rights. The working people of the villages will only then take a militant stand in the struggle against autocracy ... if the working class, the urban working people join their struggles for land as though it were their own cause."⁸

The leaders of the KMP gradually abandoned their views on the exclusiveness of the agrarian revolution. They recognized that the only way out of the serious situation of the working peasantry and the agrarian proletariat – a position the

⁷ PI Archives, fond 500/1, unit 197.

⁸ Ibid.

economic crisis particularly forced on them – was the partition of the latifundia – that is, the realization of the land reform.⁹

There were differing opinions for a time within the communist party about land reform even after the Seventh Congress of the Comintern. They agreed in general that land had to be given to the landless peasants, that the latifundia had to be broken up, but only after long debate was there unanimous agreement in favour of agricultural reform. While the top limit of the size of estates to be divided was not indicated (this was done only in 1942 and 1943), the party took part in working out the programme together with the democratic groups¹⁰ fighting for land reform. In doing so, it indicated that there was no essential difference in principle between the KMP and these groups on this question.

The KMP first of all emphasized that the land should be given to those who cultivated it and its implementation should be entrusted, in collaboration with and the guidance of the parties concerned, to the landless peasants. This standpoint conformed with the objectives of the struggle for the "creation of a democratic Hungary", and the alliance policy was subordinated to these goals. However, it was an error that the KMP did not concretely determine the size of estates to be distributed and did not present a detailed agricultural programme. Thus, it allowed others to take the initiative, and was unable to provide the communists and their sympathizers with any direct means of agitation with which to win over the peasantry.

In 1936 and 1937 the KMP undertook to win over, in addition to the working peasants, primarily the urban petty-bourgeoisie and the progressive intelligentsia, but even then already the opportunity existed for further expanding the alliance. At this time the theoreticians of the KMP were already aware of the sharpening contradictions within the ruling class itself, between the adherents of the traditional Hungarian fascist methods instituted during the period when István Bethlen was Prime Minister, and those who wanted to introduce a Hitlerite totalitarian fascist regime. Although at this time the party still saw little possibility for drawing a part of the bourgeoisie into the fight against fascism, it was these contradictions within the ruling class which called attention to the fact that a part of them might later become temporary allies in the struggle against the political and economic influence of the Nazis, and for the independence of the country.

The recognition that the *popular front was not only an alliance of classes but of parties as well* was of great importance in formulating an alliance policy. The communist party succeeded in clarifying within its own ranks what its relationship

⁹ Agrarian relations in Hungary were among the most backward in Europe. In the 1930s there were nearly two million peasants including half a million farm hands, or 36 per cent of the agricultural population, who had no land of their own at all. 1,600,000 persons, 33 per cent of the agricultural population, had farms ranging in size from 0.1 to 5 cadastral holds (1 c. h. = 2.27 acres) which was 10 per cent of the cultivated area, or 1,640,000 cadastral holds. The over one million small-holders and medium landowners, or 22 per cent with land of 5–20 holds, owned 21.1 per cent of all the land, or three and one half million holds. 23 per cent, or 350,000 persons were kulaks with 4 million holds of land, 26 per cent of the total land. While the number of estate owners with more than 200 holds comprised barely one per cent of the population, they owned 7 million cadastral holds, or 43 per cent of the total farm area.

¹⁰ The National Youth Committee of the MSzDP, the University Circle, and the March Front set the top limit at 200 and 500 holds.

with the opposition parties to the left of the government should be. It rescinded its former, incorrect evaluation which maintained that "in Hungary all opposition parties are also fascist". Its starting point was that the bourgeois opposition parties (FKGP, Christian Party, Rassay Party, etc.) were for the most part rallying those masses which the communists were trying to win for the popular front. In assessing these parties, the only real consideration was "what actual barriers they put up against the attempt at autocracy (Hitlerite fascism), and what stand they take on the issue of protecting and extending public liberties".¹¹ And since some of the leaders of these parties, and the majority of their members were opposed to fascism and were supporters of democratic freedoms they by all means had to be reckoned with as possible future allies.

In the mid-1930s these parties really had in their ranks or under their influence a part of that strata interested in the fight against fascism. Among these was the FKGP which could most definitely be counted on in the anti-fascist struggle. This party included first of all the wealthier farmers and peasants with medium-sized holdings who sought protection from the economic despotism of the latifundia and the economic policy of the government which effected them. A minority of the party were small peasants, bourgeois elements and intellectuals. This party did not oppose the counter-revolutionary regime, and despite some vague calls for a land reform it "took cognizance" of the latifundia system. Following the death of the large-estate owner Gáspár Gaál, Tibor Eckhardt became the leader of the party. Eckhardt, who had changed his political views several times, had made pacts with the Gömbös administration which strove to introduce Nazi methods and totalitarian fascism. However, in the second half of the 1930s some people were given a place in the leadership (István Dobi, Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky and others) who wanted to transform the party into an organization which would serve the interests of the working peasantry, protect political liberties and the independence of the country, seek the cooperation of the workers and peasants, and support the establishment of an anti-fascist popular front. The KMP was correct, however, as later events proved, in concluding that this party was a significant force in the struggle for a democratic Hungary even though its political activity was noted for its servitude to the counter-revolutionary regime, and for revisionism in foreign policy rather than for protecting the universal interests of the working people and the country.

The Christian Economic and Social Party was strictly a Budapest party. It embraced primarily the middle bourgeoisie, the Budapest petty-bourgeoisie, and the Catholic intelligentsia, but also included in its ranks a large number of the civil service employees of Budapest. They also exerted significant influence on the workers in Budapest's factories. The Christian Socialist workers' organizations in the Budapest factories were guided by this party. The Christian Party faithfully supported the Horthy regime, but opposed the introduction of Nazi methods in Hungary. It took a stand against the attempts of the Gömbös administration to establish totalitarian fascism. On a number of occasions the Christian trade unions acted together with the social-democrat trade unions, principally in economic demands. Later, particularly during the war period, the political influ-

¹¹ PI Archives, fond 500/1, unit 198.

ence of the Christian Party was greatly narrowed as Budapest's autonomy gradually declined.

The Bourgeois Freedom Party, a liberal party, also attracted in part the big capitalists, but in the main only the middle and petty-bourgeoisie of Budapest and was headed by Károly Rassay, the bourgeois anti-Hitlerist, liberal minded, though anti-communist, politician. This party was opposed to the introduction of Nazi methods, it was against racial discrimination and the continually growing economic and political influence of Hitler's Germany, but it was equally anti-Soviet Union. It was opposed to all groupings which included the MSzDP. Its political objectives approximated those of the legitimists who wanted to restore the Habsburg throne.

The majority of the masses of these parties, and a part of their leadership, comprised the force on which the KMP could rely as potential and temporary allies in the struggle for the popular front and the establishment of democratic cooperation. The leaders of these parties, while cognizant of the dangers inherent in the advance of fascism, nevertheless one and all rejected the people's front which was the form of defence developed in the Western European countries. A good part of their masses, even if they instinctively felt and admitted the need for a rallying the democratic forces, always put their class interests above the universal interests of the country.

Therefore, because of the political immaturity of the objective forces concerned with the creation of a democratic Hungary, the KMP found itself in a much more difficult position than the communist parties of the Western countries. The bourgeois opposition parties of Hungary could be brought closer and connected with the struggle to rally the national forces only by indirect means, through the MSzDP, or through social or political movements and organizations acceptable to these parties.

The leaders of the KMP, through communist influence on the organized workers, tried to stimulate the MSzDP to take the initial steps to accomplish this.

The *Dolgozók Lapja* wrote in its April 1937 issue that "It is up to the MSzDP to urge the cooperation of all the bourgeois parties in the struggle for the basic democratic demands which they themselves support".

This justified effort of the KMP was approved by the majority of the MSzDP's membership and by the majority of the organized workers. However, these potentially important forces did not actively force the leadership of the MSzDP to change its opposition to the people's front. Therefore, at that time the MSzDP did not become the legal centre for the development of the popular front movement.

The KMP also tried to set up one or two centres for the purpose of concentrating the anti-fascist democratic forces.

On the ideological front they wished to establish this centre around the periodical *Gondolat*, which appeared legally and was edited by communists. The editorial board of the *Gondolat* had close ties with the periodical of the "populist writers", *Válasz*. It criticized the incorrect views of the *Válasz*, and supported those works which stimulated an anti-fascist outlook. The editorial board of the *Gondolat* had an important role in the founding, by Ferenc Hont, a member of the KMP, of the publication *Független Színpad* and in organizing the panel of anti-fascist democratic actors, which bore the same name as the publication. For the purpose of guiding and financing the panel they formed a Literary and Arts

Council composed mostly of anti-Nazi editors of progressive publications, *Gondolat*, *Korunk Szava*, *Literatura*, *Magyar Út*, *Magyarság Tudomány*, *Nyugat*, *Századunk*, *Szép Szó*, *Válasz* and representatives of anti-fascist left wing parties. Their main aim was to unite all intellectuals who were struggling to build a progressive, democratic Hungary.

Within a short period of time the *Gondolat*, working within established legal boundaries, became the forum for debates on the popular front and related ideological questions, for urging manifestations of anti-fascist cooperation and practical activities related to these.

The KMP had the most influence among the various democratic groups centered around the "populist writers". It worked to establish a joint body to include the social-democratic youth organizations, and primarily its communist led National Youth Committee (OIB), the KMP influenced progressive university groups to organize meetings of the populist writers, and that this be the starting point for rallying the forces of the anti-fascist popular front. On the proposal of the communists¹², a meeting was held on February 4-5, 1937 for the purpose of expressing opposition to the attempts of the Darányi administration to introduce youth work camps. All the more influential youth organizations were invited to participate.

The most important lesson for the meeting was summarized by József Darvas, one of the leaders of the left wing populist writers, in the columns of the *Gondolat*. He wrote that even without a common world outlook identical conclusions will be arrived at on concrete issues by those who base their judgement on the situation of the Hungarian workers, on their need for more bread and greater liberty.

Another important milestone in realizing the alliance policy in practice was the establishment of the March Front. The KMP had already at the beginning of 1934 made contact with the various progressive university student organizations of Budapest, Debrecen and Szeged. After the young communist teacher László Rajk left Hungary in July 1936, the centre of the progressive student movement temporarily moved from Budapest to Debrecen. In Debrecen, Gyula Kállai, the young communist journalist, was particularly influential and already in 1935 he had explained in detail to circles of young people in Debrecen the views of the communists about the need for the cooperation of workers, the working peasants and the progressive intelligentsia, and for a democratic land reform. A leading role in the Debrecen movement was played by the young communist doctor Sándor Zöld, and it was here that Lajos Fehér, the young teacher and journalist also joined the movement. From the KMP ranks an important role was played in the work of the Debrecen and Budapest university groups by the economist, Ferenc Donáth, the historian, Aladár Mód, and the lawyer and scientist, Erik Molnár. These university groups, together with the "populist writers" played a significant part in the creation of the March Front.

On March 15, 1937, the anniversary of the 1848 Hungarian War of Independence, the Budapest University Circle, at the proposal of the party, held a celebration in the garden of the National Museum, the site of the outbreak of the revolution. Here they presented a 12-point programme which had been jointly prepared by the University Circle and the "populist writers", and which also sig-

¹² PI Archives, fond 500/2.

nalized the launching of the March Front. (Its name also expressed adherence to the democratic objectives of the 1848 revolution.) The MSzDP held a mass meeting simultaneously with the founding of the March Front. At this mass meeting over ten thousand workers demonstrated for the ideals of 1848, for an independent, democratic Hungary. The two separately held meetings, despite the similarity of purpose, also reflected the division of the democratic forces. Had they joined forces then, the "holy alliance" of the workers, peasants and intellectuals would have been not only a mere slogan, but the first real step towards cooperation.

The leaders of the KMP endeavoured to unite the forces of the divided democratic camp. The March Front was aimed at bringing together the MSzDP and other left-wing opposition parties and democratic groups into a common front. As a result of discussions held during the summer of 1937, a meeting was held in Makó in October 1937 between "representatives of the social democratic party, the Small Holders' Party, the Kossuth Party, the editors of various periodicals, prominent writers..."¹³ However, these joint initiatives of the communists with the left-wing of the "populist writers" and the progressive youth movements were not properly supported by the top leadership of the social democratic party nor by the other opposition parties. These correct political efforts which expressed the desires of a large part of the working masses could not become a force of mass mobilization and could not lead to the reinforcement of the Hungarian popular front policy without the cooperation of the organizations embracing the masses of workers and peasants.

After the initial successes, the basic contradictions which arose regarding the use of militant methods, contributed to the split of the anti-fascist democratic camp. The right wing of the anti-fascist camp rejected mass actions in the struggle against fascism and considered only the "intellectual movement" to be expedient. Their reasoning was that anti-fascist activity by the masses would lead to greater retaliation by the fascist movement and in general by the fascist forces. However, the left-wing of this camp was in favour of political action and of mobilizing the masses to active struggle. They realized that it was futile to fight with purely intellectual weapons the Nazi packed movements which were rapidly developing at that time and gradually taking control of the streets. In the heated debate around this issue, the radical writer and politician Ferenc Erdei wrote in a detailed study of the issue that "The spoken and written word, be their literary effect ever so great cannot be the weapons, but only the call to line-up in this battle. Freedom can be won by struggle, it can be created and can be defended. It must never be merely requested and awaited... There is a political road which leads to freedom, and real freedom can only be won by supremacy of forces... The fight for freedom today demands that a Hungarian writer of honest intentions help the formation and strengthening of a political movement which would be capable of creating such freedom".¹⁴ As opposed to Erdei's standpoint, Illés Mónus, the leading

¹³ Some of those who took part in the three day meeting summarized their views in the Makó Manifesto. This meeting was to have been followed by a new exchange of views in Berettyóújfalu in November, but this was not permitted by the authorities. (PI Archives, fond 500/2; *Válasz*, November and December 1939.)

¹⁴ Erdei, F.: "A szabadság politikája" (The Policy of Freedom) *Válasz*, December 1937.

ideologist of the MSzDP, and editor-in-chief of *Szocializmus*, the publication of the MSzDP, expounded the views of the other group in direct reply to Erdei. "No matter how small the writers' group, if they tenaciously, persistently, patiently and convincingly proclaim their principles, if they disseminate the recognized truths, it will have a greater and more lasting effect than politicizing on a low level..."¹⁵

These internal dissensions, in addition to the series of blows dealt by the reaction, led to a temporary collapse of the organizational framework of the barely developing popular front and to the disintegration of the movement. Therefore, in 1936 and 1937 the first great opportunity for the cooperation of the democratic forces was not utilized at a time when the anti-fascist forces were achieving substantial successes on the international scale. It was a time when the policy of the Gömbös administration aimed at the introduction of totalitarian fascism, and the continuous deterioration in the economic situation had led to the economic and political resistance of the working masses. The greatest theoretical achievement of this period was that the popular front policy of the KMP became the basis for the cooperation of the democratic forces, and for the ideology of the democratic camp.

The Formation of an Anti-Hitler National United Front Policy

In many respects 1938 was an important date in the period preceding the Second World War. The fate of the French popular front was finally sealed because of the policy of the French socialists, and the situation of the Spanish civil war was also becoming increasingly hopeless. Fascism launched new attacks not only in Germany, but in almost all European countries, even where it was not in power. The Anschluss of March 1938, and the Munich Agreement which followed also threatened Hungary with serious consequences. The danger of which the communists had warned the country already in the 1930s now became acute. "The country is in danger!" wrote the April 1938 issue of *Dolgozók Lapja*. "The events in Austria should open the eyes and ears of those who until now wanted neither to see nor hear, because they did not want to take notice of the danger threatening Hungary... National cooperation, the cooperation of all Hungarians, is needed to face this national danger."

The threat to the country's independence and its national existence created a new situation. The Hungarian Party of Communists concluded that the guidelines of 1936-1937 had to be modified to meet the changed conditions. It recognized that the anti-fascist fight in Hungary should no longer be directed only against finance capital and the latifundium implementing fascist dictatorship, but first of all against German fascism which was threatening the independence of the country, and the Germanophile forces serving it.

The communist party, quite understandably, at that time regarded the defence of the country's independence as the cardinal point of its popular front policy. The communists thought that awareness of the direct danger to the country's independence would make it possible to expand the camp of temporary allies. It was

¹⁵ Mónus, I.: "Válaszúton" (At the Crossroads), *Szocializmus*, December 1937.

necessary now not only for the democratic, anti-fascist forces to cooperate, but also for all forces willing to fight for the independence of the country to join in united action, because only such cooperation could save the country from a national catastrophe similar to the *Anschluss*.

In this new situation the party stated that "... the fight against fascism and the task of defending national independence does not mean simply that another has been added to the people's democratic tasks, that, in addition to the land question, suffrage, freedom of assembly, etc., one more democratic task has to be solved but rather that the whole arena of struggle is different, the grouping of classes has changed, and therefore a new light has been cast on the "old" democratic tasks... subordinating them to the major task of fighting against fascism."¹⁶ *Therefore, the major question of the Hungarian popular front policy at this time was the national question, the independence of the country, and the creation of an anti-Hitler national unity.* It stemmed from this that hereafter the other fundamental demand of the popular front policy, the democratic transformation of the country, could only be realized within the framework of and in subordination to national unity. *The guarding of national independence and the democratic transformation of the country were inseparable from each other. Nevertheless, the latter could only be put on the agenda when and to the extent that the first, major question was solved.*

The Hungarian communists drew this conclusion from the lessons of the 1848–1849 War of Independence, from the experiences of the French and Spanish popular fronts, and mainly from the analysis of the fundamental differences between 1848 and 1938. In 1848 the driving force of and at the same time the brake on the national war of independence was the national unity which had been created on the field of battle for the independence of the country. At that time the gentry, which was the leading force of the revolution, opposed a popular unity which would take the success and consistency of the struggle for granted. In 1938, the working class by leading the struggle for independence could and also had to lead the national unity, concluded József Révai in the work quoted above. Révai added that the fact that under the given historical conditions class aims have begun to approximate the aims affecting the whole nation means that not only has the social weight of the working class been enhanced but its sphere of influence has also been extended. The fact that the working class can put its class objectives more organically and vividly in the service of universal national interests, enables it to become the spokesman for the universal strivings of the entire people, and at the same time the class destined to lead the struggle for this.

The party sought to bring the kulaks, and even the anti-German, Anglophile group of the bourgeoisie into the national unity. This required further compromise considering the overall objectives of the communists. The party had to expand the militant programme with demands which would rouse the interest of the aforementioned classes and groups in the struggle for independence but would not violate the fundamental interests of the working masses within the popular front. Although the programme only took final shape in 1941, its main lines had already been formulated in this period. "Our popular democratic programme," Révai wrote in an article entitled "The lessons of 1848" "cannot be

¹⁶ Révai, J.: *Marxizmus, népiesség, magyarság*, p. 350, Szikra, Budapest, 1949.

neutral regarding the German threat to Hungarian industry, nor can it favour the cartels either. The KMP has to rise to the defense of Hungarian industry... The protection of industry and the peasantry has to form the single backbone of a great national programme of the new struggle for independence and against colonialization."¹⁷

Similar ideas filled the columns of the periodical *Tovább*, too. It was founded in March 1938 jointly by the populist left-wing and the communists. Gyula Kállai, in an article urging the formation of a people's front, wrote: "The annexation of Austria raises the question of Hungarian independence in all its nakedness. The only guarantee of national independence against fascism and the imperialist appetite of the fascists is a national-popular front on the broadest and deepest possible foundation."¹⁸ These demands were incorporated in the programme of action presented by the communist led National Youth Committee to the leadership of the MSzDP, and in the address by Gyula Kulich, the communist secretary of the OIB at the January 1939 congress of the MSzDP.¹⁹

The communists, while working out their more inclusive alliance policy, had to meet the concern of the working class as to whether putting the popular front policy, and particularly the fight for independence to the fore, meant that the proletariat would have to subordinate its final goal for a longer period, or would this very struggle lead to its more rapid attainment. The KMP pointed out that the struggle for the bourgeois democratic transformation and the fight against fascism was interwoven with the defence of the country's independence. This relegated the possible transition to socialist revolution into the background, but did not exclude it. The very fact that the party believed that the main task of the country and the entire Hungarian people could be solved only under the leadership of the working class was proof that certain tasks of the socialist transformation could already be solved in this period depending on the weight and activity of the masses interested in the transition to the socialist revolution.

The communist party's alliance policy reckoned with the fact that following the *Anschluss* the political and economic pressure of the Germans on Hungary would further increase, and this would inevitably lead to a further growth of the pro-Nazi groups. The *Anschluss* and later the dismembering of Czechoslovakia greatly strengthened German influence in the Hungarian economy as well. All the capital investments of Austrian finance capital in Hungary were taken over by the Germans, and about half of the country's foreign trade turnover passed into German hands. This also happened in the Balkans. Therefore, German influence was a serious threat to a part of the bourgeoisie not only in the political but in the economic fields as well. This did not only mean, as it did in 1935–1936, that the extremist, Germanophile wing of the Hungarian ruling classes would throw over the traditional Hungarian fascist methods and introduce totalitarian fascism. The concrete danger was that with the introduction of totalitarian fascism the Hungarian bourgeoisie would find itself in a position of political and economic subordination to Germany.²⁰ That wing of the Hungarian ruling classes which was

¹⁷ Révai, J.: "1848 tanulságai" (The Lessons of 1848), *Szabad Szó*, March 18, 1939.

¹⁸ Kállai, Gy.: "Népi arcvonalt" (Popular Front), *Tovább*, March 1938.

¹⁹ At this congress the official name of the party was changed from the Social Democratic Party of Hungary (MSzDP) to the Social Democratic Party (SzDP).

²⁰ In 1937 the Hungarian stocks held by foreign corporations in industry, mining, trade and other fields were as follows: Britain 8.6 per cent, Switzerland 21.4 per cent, United States 10.2 per cent.

oriented towards the West tried to prevent this, tried to ensure political and economic autonomy and ease the pressure from Hitler. These efforts included the overthrow of the Darányi administration in May 1938, and the appointment of Béla Imrédy as Prime Minister. At the end of 1938 the forces which wanted to limit Nazi influence formed an independence block against Imrédy who had completely adopted the Nazi line in both domestic and foreign policy, and with the removal of Imrédy they put their own man, Pál Teleki, at the head of the government. However, this could not lead to results because they, too, based their foreign policy – first of all the realization of expansionist, chauvinist plans – on the alliance with Germany, and in their domestic policy they tried to prevent the advance of the Nazi trend in opposition to the democratic forces rather than with them. The communists were aware of the dangers inherent in seeking contact with them, but nevertheless felt that they might accept them as temporary allies given the possibility and the proper circumstances.

The Hungarian communists examined the question of defending independence, of national cooperation and of creating an anti-fascist popular front not solely from the point of view of Hungarian national interests but also because of its great international importance as well. Hungary had a decisive role in Hitler's plan for Central and South-Eastern Europe. It was suited to this purpose because its system was a first cousin to German fascism, and primarily because its territorial demands on the neighbouring countries, was the trump card in Hitler's hand.

The communists warned the country's democratic public opinion against the dangers of nationalism and chauvinism which also spread to a large part of the working masses and prevented the creation of a wide based class alliance. They pointed out that the demand for territorial expansion was leading to the further advance of fascism, to dragging the country towards war and to the loss of its independence, and was a stab in the back not only of the Hungarian but of the international anti-fascist forces as well. They emphasized that reparation for the injustice of Trianon could not to be regarded simply a special Hungarian cause, and that of the countries concerned in this question. Under present conditions the question of Trianon had to be subordinated to the international struggle of fascist and anti-fascist forces, to be solved together with all the democratic and peace-loving forces of Europe.

This was the main line of thought in the 1938 issues of the *Dolgozók Lapja*. The party tried to expose the true aims and essence of the expansion proclaimed and demanded by the fascists, and its real class and national content.²¹

Germany 11.7 per cent, Austria 16.5 per cent, Holland 5.2 per cent, Belgium 3.7 per cent, Czechoslovakia 3.2 per cent and France 2.7 per cent. Therefore, in 1937, German capital interest did not predominate. However, following the annexation of Austria a significant change took place. Germany jumped to first place, reaching almost 30 per cent. And this 30 per cent was concentrated on branches of industry of decisive importance. With each of Hitler's territorial conquests this ratio grew.

²¹ "The Treaty of Trianon was unjust. The armed Hungarian revolutionary workers and peasantry already fought against it (1919) when it was called the Vix Memorandum. It was precisely those who are today in power who at that time stabbed this struggle in the back and allied themselves with the enemy..."

Révai, J.: "1849 október 6: Világos-Arad ... 1938 október 6: Új 'Világos-Arad'?" (October 6, 1849: Világos-Arad ... October 6, 1938: New 'Világos-Arad?'), *Szabad Szó*, October 22, 1938.

The territorial expansion of Hungary was only a side issue, a part of Hitler's expansion to the East, the communists declared. Territorial expansion will not help to stabilize but rather weaken Hungarian national unity, and sharpen the contradictions between the states of the Danube Basin so that following "adequate preparations the people of the Danubian Basin and the Balkans may be driven into a war to be launched against the Soviet Union".²²

It was not only important to show the relationship between territorial expansion and national independence because it exposed the true goals of the fascists, but also as a warning to the leaders of the left-wing opposition parties and all who examined the question of independence and territorial expansion as separate entities, unrelated to each other. The majority of the leaders of the opposition parties, and in fact a part of the bourgeoisie clearly saw that the *Anschluss*, the endeavours of the German fascists in Central Europe and the Balkans, was directly threatening Hungary's independence, too. Following the Munich Agreement and then the Vienna decisions awarding Hungary Southern Slovakian areas, the same leaders and the masses they influenced completely lost sight of this danger. The MSZDP, which had earlier favoured solving the injustice of Trianon, after talks with the neighbouring peoples, went so far in supporting territorial demands as to urge an alliance even with the extremist pro-Nazi parties. The leaders of the FKGP were of a like mind.

In the spring of 1938 the first Hungarian law on the Jews based on the Nürnberg Laws was enacted. At the same time a law was passed²³ which silenced or restricted the democratic and liberal press, and another one which further limited what had already been one of the most reactionary election laws in Europe.²⁴ This was followed by a new effort of the democratic and anti-fascist forces to join their divided ranks in a struggle against these laws. In the autumn of 1938, the territorial expansion of Hungary with Hitler's aid, and a renewed upsurge of nationalism which accompanied the vicious anti-semitism and the rise of Nazi influence, prevented these attempts at cooperation from developing into an organized anti-fascist front. The tendency, in fact, turned to the opposite direction.

The propaganda of "peaceful expansion", "territorial expansion without war", and the simultaneously resultant war prosperity which led to a slow rise in living standards and the ending of unemployment, obliterated from the minds of the majority of the working masses concerned with the people's front the danger which directly threatened Hungary. It was obliterated because the fascist regime did everything to make use of the instinctive or artificially incited dissatisfaction of the masses, arising from the unjust peace of Trianon, to justify its own anti-national objectives. But it was also obliterated by the fact that the opposition forces, which still had had the opportunity to rouse the nation prior to the catastrophe, themselves contributed toward lulling the conscience of the nation. The annexation

²² Ibid.

²³ The new May 1938 press law contained restrictions which made it impossible for periodicals to appear. After the law was brought into effect all the press organs of the SZDP and the trade unions with the exception of *Népszava*, a daily newspaper, were banned.

²⁴ The 1938 election law made the secret ballot general but restricted suffrage to those who had finished school, resided for six years at the same place, to women who had completed school or had four children, to those whose parents were both of the Christian religion, so that the result was that half a million citizens who had previously been entitled to vote were deprived of that right.

tion of the areas of Southern Slovakia was referred to as the "rise of the nation" and "compensation for injustice, and the beneficial creative rule of liberty".²⁵

The territorial annexations in the first stage of the Second World War were viewed by the working masses – as the result of the constantly incited expansionist atmosphere – as redress of an injury the nation had borne for two decades, and not as the prelude to a catastrophic policy. The development of German-Hungarian relations had a similar effect on moulding the thinking of a considerable part of the anti-Nazi forces. No other country, apart from Slovakia and Croatia, benefited in the period between 1938 and 1941 from German expansion as did Hungary. The concept of a German-Hungarian "common destiny" and the idea of an alliance between the two nations was for a long time not apparently alien to Hungarian national objectives because, on the surface, the alliance did not seem to put Hungary in a subordinate position. Hitler's Germany did not try to make any essential changes in the internal Hungarian power relations (it made use of even extremist pro-Nazi forces only as reservers) and in fact until 1941, again on the surface, it did not completely prevent the mobility of Hungarian foreign policy. Nazi diplomatic, military and economic pressure was always accompanied by emphasis on Hungarian interest.

As a result of all this, particularly the majority of the politically immature petty-bourgeoisie and even a part of the workers were seduced by the "territorial expansion", by German successes, and the results of the German-Hungarian "common destiny". These masses, under the influence of the pro-Nazi arrow-cross parties' social demagogic utilization of the just demands of the workers, turned to the right instead of the left, affected by the propaganda which promised land, work and more bread, while another substantial part became confused and viewed events passively. Only a minority, the politically developed, class-conscious workers, peasants and intelligentsia retained their perspicacity in the chauvinist, nationalist frenzy.

International events, the complete collapse of Czechoslovakia and the defeat of the Spanish civil war did not favour the rallying of the democratic forces. The Soviet-German non-aggression treaty, unexpectedly signed in August 1939, which on the part of the Soviet Union was a compromise that, the Soviet Union was compelled to make, was also a disturbing factor and seriously affected the situation of the progressive forces at the outbreak of the Second World War. The confusion grew when in order to increase her defensive capacity and to further the interests of the entire European anti-fascist camp, the Soviet Union obtained additional territory, and finally by the Soviet-Finnish war. (Sympathy with Finland, because of the kinship between the two peoples, was unusually high in Hungary, so that the anti-Soviet, reactionary propaganda was even more effective.) The right-wing leaders of the SzDP and the FKGP sought to lessen the burden of fascist pressure by increasing their anti-Soviet and anti-communist propaganda and thereby they only increased the confusion within the democratic camp.

Therefore, the work of the communists and of those who wanted to create an anti-Nazi front became increasingly difficult. They had to "swim against the tide" in their struggle for a united front of the democratic forces, and for the develop-

²⁵ "Az első állomás-hazafelé" (The First Station on the Way Home), *Népszava*, October 6, 1938.

ment of an anti-fascist independence policy. In 1939 and 1940 they were more concerned with keeping the need for a democratic front alive than with its practical realization. The Communist Party also went through a serious organizational crisis at this time. In the summer of 1936 most of the KMP organizations were dissolved. Although the reorganization began as early as 1937, real results were attained only in 1939 and mainly in 1940. The problems of guiding the party were also serious. The Central Committee of the KMP had led the activities of the communists from Prague until the middle of 1938. International events made it impossible to guide the party from abroad. Therefore, in addition to the aforementioned problems, the activity of the communists was made even more difficult by organizational worries.

In the autumn of 1940 the Central Committee was reconstituted in Hungary. The first thing the Committee did was to examine the changes the war had brought about in the material situation, mood and consciousness of the classes and groups interested in forming a democratic front. As a result, it concluded that the "territorial expansion without war", the successive German victories, the war prosperity, anti-semitism, and the social demagoguery of the arrow-cross parties still greatly influenced certain working strata and primarily petty-bourgeois masses. However, an opposite trend had already started which might create favourable conditions for an anti-fascist independence movement. Even as the working class was enjoying the benefits of wartime prosperity it was being hit increasingly by extraordinary war measures, drastic curtailment of consumer goods, the introduction of military supervision in the war plants, the shifting of the war burdens onto the working class under various pretexts and military service which was becoming frequent.

The working peasantry faced a similar situation. The influence of the arrow-cross movement diminished because of the postponement of the promised land distribution, and the frequent exposure of its social demagoguery. The petty-bourgeoisie and even a part of the bourgeoisie viewed with increasing distaste the game played by Hitler with Hungary's expansionist demands. In the autumn of 1940 the anxiety of the anti-German wing of the ruling classes was further increased when Hitler demanded serious political and economic concessions in return for granting Northern Transylvania to Hungary (complete freedom to organize for the German nationality organization, the Volksbund, and of the arrow-cross party with its pro-Nazi membership; joining the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis; and new large scale exports of raw materials, first of all, agricultural products). The national minorities of the annexed areas and the Hungarian population, too, found that instead of the promised "liberation" they were in a more precarious political and economic situation than before. New anti-semitic laws resulted in the removal of a broad section of mostly petty-bourgeois Jews from public life, increasing their connections' fear and also dissatisfaction. The April 1941 Yugoslav events, Hungary's participation in the dismembering of Yugoslavia, the suicide of Prime Minister Pál Teleki²⁶ and the growing danger that

²⁶ Pál Teleki, between 1939 and 1941, in the course of his second term as Prime Minister, tried to maintain good relations with Hitler's Germany, too, so as to increase the country's territory in this way, but not to loose its "good" ties with Britain. On April 3, 1941 he realized that this policy could no longer be continued. He was, however, incapable of turning against Hitler yet viewed alienation from Britain as a national catastrophe, and he committed suicide.

Hungary might be drawn into the war against the Western Powers on the side of German fascism, made the sober-minded bourgeoisie, if nothing else, at least suspicious that Hungary was drifting towards catastrophe.

The communists also viewed the changes in the political attitude of the SzDP and trade union members as favourable. There were definite signs that the persistent, patient activity of the communists and the left-wing social democrats within the trade unions and the MSzDP since the mid-1930s for united action were beginning to bear fruit. The majority of the organized workers opposed the party's right-wing leadership in many political issues important to the development of an anti-fascist independence movement. For example, they condemned the leaders' anti-Soviet outburst during the Soviet-Finnish War, disagreed with the pledge of loyalty to the Teleki administration²⁷ and with the attempt to disband the communist led National Youth Committee. There was an ever growing number of those who demanded definite action against the government which served the Nazis. Although the right-wing leaders still had a strong base in the SzDP and in the elected bodies, the influence of the left-wing steadily increased. The right-wing's monopoly on the party's daily newspaper, *Népszava*, was ended and the influence of the left-wing social democrats and communists was more asserted.

Taking all this into consideration, the Central Committee of the KMP, at its April 1941 meeting, finalized and incorporated in its programme the essence of its independence policy and once again began the struggle for a resurgence of the anti-fascist independence movement.

The resolution of the Central Committee stated that the major task of the party was to mobilize all forces opposed to the government's pro-Hitler policy in defence of the country's independence. The unlimited assertion of Nazi influence in questions deciding the fate of the country had to be prevented, and Bárdossy, who had succeeded, over the corpse of Teleki, to the Prime Minister's velvet seat, and his administration had to be prevented from taking further fatal steps which would be catastrophic for the country. The resolution stated that the party would devote all its activity to the fight for independence. The central slogan which was valid until the end of the war, "Independent, free, democratic Hungary!" also expressed this.

The resolution outlined the objectives of the independence policy in a detailed programme. In foreign policy it called for a break with Hitler and the Axis powers, and for a sincere, friendly relationship with the Soviet Union, with the Western democratic and neighbouring countries. It did not support the Vienna Decisions. In opposition to the robber territorial policy it proposed that the question be solved on the basis of the right to self-determination, the free and peaceful agreement of the peoples concerned, and the cooperation of the Hungarian people and their neighbours. It declared that the division of Transylvania into two parts was a fascist manoeuvre aimed at linking both countries to the Hitlerite block. It emphasized that the people of Transylvania themselves should decide where they

²⁷ In January 1940 the Trade-Union Council proclaimed loyalty to the policies of Pál Teleki, and its willingness to take part in the "national cooperation" urged by the Prime Minister, and also to moderate its class struggle programme". Teleki rejected the offer.

belonged. In this resolution the KMP also stated that in the anti-fascist struggle the territorial question had only a subordinate role.

In domestic policy, the demands of the programme were the following: The working peasantry be granted land through a radical land reform; Hungarian industry be rapidly developed by means of establishing and improving economic relations with the Soviet Union, with the states of the Danubian Basin, while simultaneously gradually replacing German capital; the state and social order be democratized; the national minority question be solved on the basis of complete equality before the law. The democratic programme points included the introduction of the universal and secret suffrage; the democratization of the army, the courts, the school and educational system; and the broad scale construction of social institutions.

This programme was dedicated to the establishment of a base for a broad class alliance. Thus the Central Committee resolved the question of "with whom", that is, the circle of allies who could be drawn into the struggle for independence. It made clear that in this struggle the communist would cooperate with all, irrespective of class, politics, ideology, religion or race, who were opposed to and willing to resist the policy of those serving fascist Germany.

The resolution of April 1941 particularly stressed that the basic condition for the realization of an anti-fascist and anti-Hitler national unity on a wide class basis, and for the development of the struggle for independence, continued to be the establishment of the united action of the working class, and the ensuring of its leading role. It pointed out that the fight for independence was a special form of class struggle, but under the given historical conditions it was the only feasible road. At this stage the main fire of the working class was not to be directed against capitalist exploitation in general, but against the monopoly capital and large-estate owner clique serving the Germans, and the government embodying that policy.²⁸ It underscored that the party would continue to organize and lead the fight of the working masses against capitalist exploitation and oppression, but in such a way that this should not prevent but accelerate the realization of the major objective.

The Central Committee, by involving a large section of the party membership, clarified the possibilities for the practical implementation of this policy. They tried to make maximum use of all the legal opportunities implicit in the fight for the defence of the country's independence, and for creating the unity of the anti-fascist national forces so as to speed up and ensure the success of the activities. The party instructed its members to make use of all direct and indirect contacts, of the legal workers' organizations and the left-wing press to publicize the programme and develop the independence movement. It was decided to form a semi-legal independence committee to coordinate and integrate these activities. The committee, which attracted representatives of the various classes concerned with the cause, was formed within a short period of time.

²⁸ Party leaders repeatedly returned to the question of "with whom" and to problems of the class struggle because communists and organized workers found these the most difficult to understand. In 1942 the first issue of *Szabad Nép*, which appeared as the central organ of the KMP, was almost completely devoted to this problem.

After the adoption of the Central Committee's resolutions at its April meeting, the anti-fascist and anti-Hitler national cooperation, or to use the popular language of that time, the independence policy, became the main goal of the party. As a result of this policy an independence movement began to develop which, after June 1941 and the beginning of the war against the Soviet Union, encompassed ever broader sections of the working masses, the petty-bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie. During the war, this movement laid the foundations for the democratic transformation which followed in the wake of the liberating Soviet army.

The Situation of the United Front of Anti-Fascist and Anti-Hitler Forces 1941-1945

The Hungarian Party of Communists continued, after Hungary entered the war against the Soviet Union, to work for the realization of the political programme of 1936 and 1941, and for the indicated alliance policy. However, it became even more important to form a broad national front, and still more urgent to mobilize ever larger masses of the people. At first, the main task of the anti-fascist forces was to prevent Hungary from participating in the war on the side of the German fascists. Now all conceivable forces were to be mobilized to press for withdrawal from the German robber war which was seriously violating the country's interests, and for a separate peace. The communists stressed that ending the participation in the anti-Soviet war was to the universal interest of the nation, for only thus could the country regain its independence and ensure its democratic transformation.

The KMP called to the banner of the anti-Hitler national unity all classes, social strata, political parties or groups, and the national minorities in the country who were willing to fight for an end to the anti-Soviet war, for recalling the army from the Eastern Front, for fulfillment of the most burning demands of the workers, and for the further development of Hungarian industry which was the basis of the independence of the country. The KMP urged the establishment of such an anti-German political front, which, in addition to the legal and illegal parties and organizations of the working class and the parties of the peasantry, would include the bourgeois parties, in fact the anti-German wing of the government party – the Party of Hungarian Life – and the anti-Hitler, anti-war members of government. In the interests of cooperation, the KMP was temporarily willing to give up its major objective, the violent overthrow of the Horthy regime, so as to further the development of as broad and strong a camp of the national unity as possible. Therefore, the KMP urged the inclusion also of such forces which were only opposed to supporting the Nazi war for fear of its consequences, and while a minority might possibly have been willing to support a limited democratization of the country, they rejected a consistent democratization. In this connection, József Révai wrote: "If a people wages a battle for liberation, or if a people has to wage a battle for liberation, then to come out for civil war would mean a stab in the back to the fight for liberation, or the prevention of the beginning of that battle for liberation which the people want to fight."²⁹

²⁹ Révai, J.: *Élni tudunk a szabadsággal* (We Were Able to Make Use of Freedom), p. 433, Szikra, Budapest, 1949.

This objective made it possible to mobilize the masses who did not understand the nature of the Horthy regime, nor how events were interrelated, but were concerned for the fate of the country and could be politically activated. Inherent in this policy and the resultant appeals was the possibility of widening the gap which had appeared in the ranks of the ruling class as a result of the internal mass movement and international events, and to alert at least some of them to the need of allying themselves with the people. These objectives would have really been brought closer to realization had the implementation of the democratic objectives of the working masses been postponed. This would have enabled the masses, which still had illusions about the Horthy regime, to gradually, in the course of the struggle, recognize that the war policy could be ended and national independence completely restored only by destroying the fascist Horthy regime, and by consistently solving the tasks of the democratic revolution. Defeating the war-like government and attaining a separate peace, however, would have put the national forces in such a position, and raise the political activity of the masses to such a level that it would have inevitably also led to the destruction of the fascist system. With that, the road to the democratic development of the nation would be opened "which amidst European conditions was equivalent to peaceful development towards socialism", wrote the April 1942 issue of the underground *Szabad Nép*. The ensurance of the leading role of the working class was not only a condition for democratic development and the transition to the socialist revolution, but also the guarantee of withdrawal from the war, of breaking with Hitler, because the anti-Germanism of the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois groups which could be regarded as allies did not mean that they would also actively oppose Hitler and his henchmen. They could only be or could only have been forced into this position by the resolute action of the working class.

After Hungary entered the war, the KMP considered it to be extremely important to include the annexed national minorities in the Independence Front and in the anti-Hitler camp of national unity. Of the nearly four million people, who had been attached to Hungary between 1938 and 1941, more than half were not of Hungarian nationality. The reactionary national minority policy of the government, which included the restriction of civil rights and cultural activities, the confiscation of their lands and the work permits of craftsmen, low wages, etc., turned them against the existing system. Hitler's policy of "divide and rule" aimed at the division of the peoples of the Danubian Basin also had a negative effect. However, a substantial part of the national minorities not only rejected the regime but also the hand proffered by the Hungarian democratic forces so that they, in fact, even if unconsciously, helped Hitler. The KMP while repudiating Hitler's unilateral territorial decisions, fought simultaneously for the democratic rights of the national minorities, and against the discriminatory measures taken against them. It also emphasized that the enemy was a common one and that the cooperation and struggle against them had also to be a common one because the national minorities "would by themselves be unable to successfully win the fight for the redress of their grievances and for changing their fate".³⁰

In an appeal to the Rumanian population of the annexed Northern Transylvania, the KMP clearly explained that absolute equality and freedom was the

³⁰ "Népi egységet" (For Popular Unity), *Népszava*, May 25, 1941.

basic precondition for the victory of the democratic national front "and the coexistence of the peoples of Hungary. The democratic Hungarians of Transylvania here and the Rumanians there have to assume the responsibility for giving a fraternal hand to the sons of the minority nation in this situation consciously incited by the Hitlers of today and by their own reactionaries. We appeal to them to join the common struggle against the common enemy. We urge the Rumanians living in Hungary to end their political passivity. Their workers, peasants and intelligentsia have to become a part of the democratic militant front which is fighting for the freedom of the whole country, so that all the peoples of the country may be free. The Rumanians in Hungary will, together with us, find their comrades-in-arms in the militant, democratic factors within the same national borders, and together with them fight not only for Hungary, but for a happier future and the freedom of all the peoples in the Danubian Basin."³¹

The Hungarian Party of Communists developed its style of work at the same time as it did its alliance policy. Essential changes had already occurred in this field in the latter half of the 1930s. This appeared principally in the correct political orientation toward the social democrats, and certain strata of the peasantry. The communists now had to politicize in such a way that the common cause would be advanced together with those on the opposite side of the class struggle, with the enemies of the proletariat, while at the same time protecting the interests of the working people. The erroneous views of the potential allies had to be argued against in such a way as not to alienate them but rather to draw them closer to the movement against the war and fascism. Those questions had to be put to the fore which would bind the anti-Hitler groups of varying social interest together and not those which would divide them.

History has since then proved that the political programme which called for an anti-fascist democratic and anti-Hitler national unity was the only constructive national programme possible. This programme was based on a correct analysis of Hungarian class relations which realistically evaluated the shift in the international balance of power following the military attack on the Soviet Union, and reckoned on the latter affecting internal relations in Hungary. This was also faithfully reflected by the results. For the first time after making its popular front policy public, the party, with the help of communist journalists, succeeded in making its programme the common property of the whole nation. A nation-wide press debate ensued around this programme with the paper of the SzDP, the *Népszava*, playing a central role together with the main organ of the liberal bourgeoisie, the *Magyar Nemzet* and the National Peasant Party's (NPP) paper, the *Szabad Szó*. The debate was joined by representatives of the anti-Nazi bourgeois press such as *A Mai Nap*, the *Független Magyar Újság*, the *Újság* and the *Független Magyarország*. With their aid, the objective of a national programme and cooperation, and the creation of a democratic, anti-Hitler front became, within a short time, the central issue of the various anti-Nazi political currents in the country.

There were differences of opinion on matters of detail among the participants in the debate, but they all agreed that it was definitely necessary to rally the national forces and to take practical measures to accomplish this. Therefore, in the

second half of 1941 the conditions for the permanent and temporary allies of the national front to approach one another and to unite came about.

The first results of the cooperation came on the basis of the realistic programme, in which a decisive role was played by the definite swing to the left of the organized workers, the strengthening of the KMP, the talks which began between the KMP and the left-wing of the SzDP, the jointly organized actions and the increasing political interestedness of the peasantry. An important factor was that the realistically thinking forces of the ruling classes and the "middle strata" associated with them were roused to the realization that national disaster could not be avoided, that it would be impossible to save their own class from complete defeat if they did not rely on the working class and the working masses, and did not at least meet a part of the just demands of the workers. They were led to this conclusion by the fact that the policy of the working class and its party was aimed at solving the "national problems", and that it had concentrated its forces not directly on socialism but on solving the more immediate tasks. However, in Hungary there were from the outset only a few members of the ruling classes who were willing to fight together with the working masses.

The correct programme of the KMP was realized in concrete achievements. On October 6, and November 1, 1941 there were anti-war demonstrations in Budapest and the famous Christmas-issue of *Népszava* carried articles by representatives of the anti-Nazi groups, from the communists to the leaders of the bourgeoisie, including such personalities as scientist Gyula Szekfű, Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, etc. calling for national cooperation. There were anti-fascist cultural programmes directed at and mobilizing large masses, such as the Csokonai, Petőfi, Ady, and Attila József evenings, the series of lectures entitled "Be Unwaveringly Faithful to your Homeland", (the first line of the national Hymn), which led to the first practical results of national cooperation. At this time an important contributing factor in this achievement was the defeat of the Nazis at Moscow and that in December 1941, Hungary, too, found herself at war with the Western Powers.

In February 1942 the Hungarian Historical Memorial Committee was founded by the representatives of the most diverse political trends, parties, groups and organizations (the KMP, the SzDP, the FKGP, the NPP, the Peasant Alliance, the different socialist trade unions, the Artists, Researchers, Writers' Association, the March 15th Permanent Committee of Northern Transylvania, and the joint committee of the worker-peasant young intelligentsia). The immediate purpose of the committee was to rouse the masses by reviving the centuries old anti-Habsburg and anti-German traditions of independence and the war of liberation, and through concrete actions connected with these traditions to bring the masses out into the street. The communists also tried to convert the Hungarian Historical Memorial Committee into a forum of the national alliance in which all individuals concerned with national cooperation and the anti-Hitler struggle, and the various political parties and groups could be represented. They wanted the committee to be a legal organizer and centre for anti-war activities and the originator of such an anti-Hitler, anti-fascist political organization on which the decisive majority of the people of the country could rely and which would enjoy their confidence. Such a committee would undertake to solve all tasks related to the withdrawal from the

³¹ PI Archives, BM VII. res 1943/7/1062.

war, to the liquidation of fascism, and to the democratic reconstruction of the country.

This is why the communists wanted to give priority to the political tasks of the anti-fascist struggle of the Hungarian Historical Memorial Committee, in contrast with the bourgeois wing of the organization which would have been satisfied with simply indirect calls for anti-Nazi patriotic propaganda. At the beginning the KMP was successful in asserting its will as against the concepts of the bourgeois wing.

The Historical Memorial Committee prepared the anti-Hitler and anti-war demonstration at the statue of Sándor Petőfi, the great revolutionary poet of the 1848 Hungarian War of Independence for March 15. The interference of the government and the retreat of the bourgeois wing of the Memorial Committee and of the right-wing social democrats were responsible for the fact that the demonstration was smaller than had been expected; nevertheless, the many thousands who did take part clearly proved that the organization of the anti-fascist forces in Hungary had also arrived at an important stage.

The establishment of the Hungarian Historical Memorial Committee and the demonstration of March 15, 1942 were outstanding events in the cooperation and open appearance of the anti-Hitler national forces. This showed that conditions were ripe for the creation of a political organization composed of the anti-Hitler forces, and for initiating mass anti-Hitler actions. At the same time this exposed the weaknesses of the cooperation and of the anti-Hitler activities, the vacillation of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces, their hesitation and fear of active participation in any form. It also showed that the right-wing social democrats still had decisive influence in the ranks of the organized workers, and could cripple the whole anti-Hitler independence movement. Finally, it also called attention to the fact that the influence of the independence movement, initiated by the KMP, had to be increased not only among the peasant, petty-bourgeois and bourgeois forces, but among the factory workers who were the backbone of the working class, and to whom the party was just beginning to find its way again. This recognition was all the more important because the aim of the KMP in organizing the March 15, 1942 demonstration was among other things, to arouse and inspire the masses, first of all the working class, to take up the struggle. However, as a result of the government terror after March 15, and the retreat of the right-wing social democrats, it was not the cooperating, progressive forces but the retarding, negative factors of anti-German cooperation which began to assert their influence.

That March 15 did not mark a turning point in the organization of the anti-Hitler forces was largely due to the changes in government prior to the demonstration. The Governor recalled Prime Minister Bárdossy who had declared war on the Soviet Union and the Western Powers. His successor was Miklós Kállay, who was associated with the pro-Western group of the ruling classes. The anti-German bourgeois, petty-bourgeois and social-democrat circles thought that the change of prime minister would be the first step toward a break with the pro-Hitler policy. The foreign policy of the Kállay administration in 1942 gave no indication of this. However, in domestic policy he modified the endeavours of his

predecessor and even if in changed form was beginning to restore the traditional "Bethlen" policy.³²

He tried to win the support of the bourgeois wing of the independence movement and strike an annihilating blow at the consistent left-wing. This was already evident during the demonstration and subsequently even more so. The Kállay administration applied mass retaliation against the most consistent forces of the anti-fascist independence movement; the KMP, the left-wing social democrats, and the trade union functionaries. About eight hundred communists and anti-fascists were arrested, and a further four hundred were sent to the front. The government also destroyed the Hungarian Historical Memorial Committee. Thus it essentially succeeded in dissolving the alliance which had been created in 1941 and 1942 but which by no means had been stabilized. Following the formation of the Kállay administration the bourgeois wing of the Independence Front, as well as the right-wing representatives of the FKGP and the SzDP gradually came under its influence. Károly Rassay, Ferenc Nagy, one of the leaders of the FKGP, Károly Peyer, president of the MSzDP and his associates held Kállay to be the man who, relying on a part of the government, the army and the state apparatus, would, without the active mobilization of the masses, but making use of their passive support, withdraw from the war and implement those tasks which they had earlier believed to be solvable only within the Independence Front formed by the communists.

Despite this, the KMP did not renounce the idea of national cooperation and the creation of a united front of anti-Hitler forces. After the serious losses caused by the arrests, it repeatedly tried, from the autumn of 1942, to revive the independence movement with the active assistance of the working masses. Already in the autumn of 1942 it proposed that closer cooperation between the two largest opposition parties, the Small Holders' and the Social Democrats, should be the focal point around which to rally the anti-Hitler national forces.³³ In its appeal in the autumn of 1942 it again called all industrial and intellectual workers, all working peasants, all progressive citizens, all parties which were concerned with forming the national front and were actively working for the independence of the country, to gather under the banner of an independent, free, democratic Hungary. The party emphasized that the changing events at the front, and the shift in the international balance of power was making it possible, and, in fact, necessary for the anti-Hitler forces to place the question of a separate peace directly on the agenda. The party's appeal pointed out that it was no longer words but deeds which were needed because the nation was awaiting leadership and example.

In the spring of 1943 the objective conditions for national cooperation became more favourable. The external reasons included the favourable change in the international balance of power, the victory of the Soviet army at Stalingrad, the series of military successes of the Western allies in Africa, and the unfolding of a crisis in the fascist coalition. Its internal reasons were the defeat of the Second

³² The substance of the "Bethlen" domestic policy was the rejection of terror and Nazi methods as the sole means of quelling the progressive forces. He successfully combined terror with attacks on the progressive forces and setting them against each other. In foreign policy, relationship with the West was considered absolutely necessary to counter-balance Hitler's Germany.

³³ PI Archives, A.IV.4., 1942/74 and A. XVII 1/1942/108.

Hungarian Army at Voronezh, and the rapid deterioration of the economic situation. However, the favourable international and domestic situations were not accompanied by the organizational strengthening of the anti-fascist forces so important to the utilization of these conditions. The working masses and particularly the working class were more rapidly shifting to the left. This was most evident in the heightening anti-war atmosphere and the desire for peace, in the national wage movements, and in significant, though isolated local movements. However, this shift to the left could not counter-balance the serious losses suffered in the summer of 1942 by the KMP and the forces it influenced.

Hungary was witness to the unfortunate and special situation that, in 1941 and 1942, when there was a rapid organizational development and an upsurge of the anti-fascist movement, the shift of the working masses to the left had barely begun. In 1943, when there was an acceleration in the leftward trend and a spurt in political activity, the anti-fascist movement had declined and because of the arrests, the movement disintegrated. This meant that the lapse of time between the strengthening of the organizational form of the political movement and the activation of the masses effected the development of the Hungarian resistance movement, and also partially accounts for its weakness.

At the same time a shift to the left by the masses frightened the ruling classes, who trembled at the thought of a repetition of the revolutions of 1918 and 1919, and the anti-Nazi bourgeois, petty-bourgeois and reformist social-democrat circles who rejected the revolutionary road as a means of solving social problems. This explains why, from the summer of 1943 on, the country was witness to the development of a united front ranging from the right wing social democrats to the Kállay administration so as to prevent the radicalization and revolutionization of the masses.

The KMP being aware of the danger, sent letters to the leaders of the bourgeois opposition parties, to prominent anti-fascists, anti-Nazi politicians, to writers and scientists, containing a programme of action which, taking the common interests of the anti-Hitler forces into consideration, smoothed the road to national cooperation. Making use of all legal and illegal means, it endeavoured to create the organized unity of the anti-Hitler forces. All this, however, proved insufficient because of the absence of a consistent left wing.

From the spring of 1943, the outlines of a definite regrouping of the anti-Hitler forces began to take shape. The right-wing forces of the resistance movement which extended from the working class to the anti-Hitler wing of the ruling classes sought to establish a national cooperation exclusive of the communists, the legal worker's left wing and the radical peasant forces. This, according to their plans, would proclaim the struggle against fascist Germany, but against the Soviet Union, too, against the domestic pro-Nazis, but also against those demanding the democratic transformation of the country. This camp was encouraged by the foreign policy efforts of the Kállay administration which increasingly began to take shape from the beginning of 1943. Its essence was that while simultaneously supporting the war against the Soviet Union, it would gradually dissociate itself from Hitler, and sign a cease-fire with the West which, subsequent to the landing of the West in the Balkans, would enable the country to withdraw from the war. In the spring of 1943 this concept still seemed realistic, but following the Moscow and Teheran conferences in the second half of the year it lost all semblance of

validity and finally led to the German occupation of Hungary without the latter striking a blow in its own defense.

Thus there was a coincidence of the so-called double-dealing policy of the Kállay administration and the aims of the anti-Hitler grouping which began to unfold in the spring of 1943 and had renounced the essence of the independence movement which the communists had earlier created. This alliance would have served to save the system. While the bourgeoisie was the main force in this grouping its political endeavours were increasingly determined by the anti-German, conservative large-estate owner-finance capitalist forces, which were also the greatest opponents of domestic social transformation. They hoped with their "resistance" to gain for themselves the right to determine the country's postwar political and social system.

These anti-Hitler forces did not examine the mass actions urged by the KMP from the point of view of the primary objective, anti-Nazism, but – because of the inherent revolutionary trends – they said that supporting the mass actions would lead to a repetition of the revolutionary events which followed World War I. Therefore, in order to avoid the latter, they gave up the former, that is, the consistent undertaking to fight against Hitler. The anti-Hitler bourgeois opposition press played an important role in forming public opinion, and the right-wing leaders of the SzDP and the FKGP also designated the task of national cooperation in that spirit. In other words, while the KMP and the radical left wing had subordinated the question of internal transformation to the anti-Hitler, anti-fascist struggle, now, in 1943 a new grouping mainly of a bourgeois trend was doing the opposite; in fear of revolution it was subordinating the anti-Hitler fight to a policy which was aimed at preventing a consistent internal transformation.

This grouping, which did not include the communists, provided the double-dealing policy of the Kállay administration with a mass base. This base did not consist only of the anti-German bourgeois and petty-bourgeois strata, but also of those masses and a part of the working class which had been disillusioned by the pro-Nazi arrow-cross and the various right-wing organizations, but which, because of the weakness of the left wing, could find no real outlet for their activity.

The KMP realized that the major barrier to national cooperation and actual withdrawal from the war was the developing "united front" which ranged from the social democrat Peyer to the large-estate owner István Bethlen, and the Kállay administrations' double-dealing policy which depended on this basis. The party emphasized, that its energies had to be aimed at this, because only thus could the barrier, which loomed in the way of real national cooperation and the anti-German struggle, be removed.

The Central Committee of the KMP at its April 1942 meeting examined the course the policy of the Kállay administration might take. The party leadership at the time even considered the possibility that the Kállay administration might, at a propitious moment, turn against the Germans and actually pull out of the war. The party therefore decided that it would then temporarily support the government. In the summer of 1943, following events in Italy, the situation was really propitious. Therefore, though sharply critical of certain mistakes, the KMP did support the FKGP memorandum to Kállay, which urged withdrawal from the war and cooperation with Kállay. The events of the days and weeks which followed the presentation of the memorandum on July 31, 1943, proved the

supposition of the KMP that Kállay neither could nor would break with Hitler. After accepting the memorandum, Kállay received the representatives of the FKGP, Zoltán Tildy, its president, and the author of the memorandum, Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, who was respected by the public for his definite anti-Nazi stand, Károly Peyer, the leader of the SzDP, and Károly Rassay, the leader of the Freedom Party. Kállay at this time, in the beginning of August, actually rejected the main demand of the memorandum, the breaking with Hitler, on the grounds that this would lead to a German occupation.³⁴ Several weeks later Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, too, after he had spoken with Horthy, with the chief of staff Ferenc Szombathelyi, and others in "power" clearly saw that the fate of the memorandum and all that it implied had been sealed.³⁵ After the Italian armistice, even the Crown Council rejected any opposition to the Germans.

In August 1943, during the talks with Kállay, an alliance was reached between the two largest left-wing opposition parties, the FKGP and the SzDP. The agreement stipulated that the two parties coordinate their views on important political decisions, urge the proclamation of the country's independence and neutrality and demand a break with the German fascists. The agreement of August 1943 was, therefore, one of the most positive acts by these two parties during the whole war. This party alliance was a blow at the counter-revolutionary regime's most sensitive spot because it was forced to accept the cooperation of the two largest social forces – the working class and the peasantry – despite the fact that the regime had done everything in its power to prevent it for twenty long years. The alliance of the two parties could have led to the real development of a broad, anti-fascist, national resistance movement.

The leaders of the two parties, however, wanted to expand the alliance only to the right. They had no intention of turning the "alliance of leaders" into an alliance of the parties' masses, for fear that this would cause a leftward shift of the two parties, radicalize them, and give new impetus to the mass movements. Thus the alliance was deprived of the opportunity of becoming the motivating force of the anti-Hitler struggle. The right-wing social democrats were also reluctant to mobilize the working class because they feared for their acceptability to the Kállay administration. They were unaware that in the meantime some right-wing small-holder leaders and others, mainly anti-Nazi finance capitalist and estate owner politicians, including the followers of István Bethlen, were striving to create a Democratic Bourgeois Alliance. They planned to include the FKGP, but not the social democrats. This solution would have naturally meant the dissolution of the two parties' alliance.³⁶

The party alliance which was brought about primarily not by internal but external factors – the events in Italy and the immediacy of a landing in the Balkans – later also continued to depend on external events, and did not become the centre for the cooperation of the democratic forces. The right-wing leaders within the party alliance, as a result of the unfavourable course which foreign political events

³⁴ Kállay, M.: *Hungarian Premier; a Personal Account of a Nation's Struggle in the Second World War* p. 243, Columbia University Press, New York, 1954.

³⁵ Széchenyi Library, Manuscript Collection, Bajcsy Heritage, 28/69.

³⁶ Széchenyi Library, Manuscript Collection, Bajcsy Heritage, 28/37, and the oral report by Árpád Szakasits.

had taken and after losing hope in an Anglo-American landing in Western-Europe, gradually abandoned those objectives, mostly in foreign policy, which had set the aims of the alliance.

The communists and their sympathizers welcomed the alliance. They tried to expand it both to the left and to the right so as to strengthen it. They hoped to make it a centre of attraction for all forces desirous of breaking with the fascists, and taking the road of real action. The left-wing forces of the party alliance and of the anti-fascist resistance movement were not, however, capable of turning this cooperation, which was positive in its initial stage, into a base and centre of national resistance. Therefore, as a result of external events, the rejection at Moscow and the Teheran Conferences of the landing in the Balkans and the unfavourable course of events in Italy, led to the gradual abandonment of their original objectives and they became a protector of "internal order" and a supporter of the double-dealing policy of the Kállay administration.

Despite these facts, by the end of 1943 the organized workers became more active. The left-wing social democrats, freed from the influence of reformist leadership, the left-wing of the FKGP, and the leaders of the agrarian worker department of the Peasant Association³⁷ which was founded in the spring of 1943, also began to understand that Kállay's double-dealing policy, and the efforts of the forces influenced by it, had failed. They began to see that warding off the immediate threat of German occupation, and withdrawal from the war was possible only through the anti-fascist world coalition, and by relying on the radical left-wing forces within the country.³⁸ It was this awareness that the communist memorandum, known as the memorandum of the Peace Party,³⁹ addressed to the above mentioned persons and groups, wanted to deepen and on that basis to form a consistent antifascist alliance. It seemed likely from all appearances that such an alliance would in fact be formed in the spring of 1944. However, on March 19, 1944 the Germans occupied Hungary and swept away all the supporters of Kállay's vacillating policy.

The Hungarian Front

The German occupation of Hungary created a new situation for the anti-Hitler forces. The failure of Kállay's double-dealing policy brought the downfall of those who, putting their trust in Kállay, had thought to wait out the war without actually fighting. Following the German occupation, even if there remained representatives and inspirers of the Kállay policy, two diametrically opposed groups came into being: those who served and those who opposed the Germans. And since the Kállay supporters and the groups they influenced were either helpless or had been politically exposed, the communist-led left-wing was the only true political force opposing the occupation forces and their Hungarian supporters. Anyone willing to oppose Hitler's Germany joined them.

³⁷ The grouping which included the middle peasants, which was partly a political and partly a protective organization, was founded in the autumn of 1941.

³⁸ Széchenyi Library, Manuscript Collection, Bajcsy Heritage, 28/91.

³⁹ From July 1943 until September 1944 the Communist Party functioned as the Peace Party.

After the German occupation the joint activity of the communists and left-wing social democrats, and then their efforts to rally the divided anti-fascist forces, bore fruit. In May 1944 a *Hungarian Front* was organized as the militant organization of the anti-fascist national resistance. The parties in the Hungarian Front accepted the programme proposed by the communists as their common platform of cooperation and of the anti-German struggle. The programme manifesto of the Hungarian Front called for a new fight for freedom and a new people's war against the German fascists. In contrast with the objectives of the FKGP's and SzDP's alliance, the Hungarian Front aimed at carrying its militant programme to victory by reliance on the masses and the Soviet Union. The programme included driving the German conquerors and their accomplices out of the country, peace with the anti-fascist world coalition, and the building of a new, independent, free, democratic Hungary. The manifesto was signed by the parties in the Hungarian Front: the communist party, which at that time was functioning as the Peace Party, the SzDP, the FKGP, and the Dual Cross Alliance composed of certain pro-western, catholic groups of the bourgeoisie.⁴⁰ Later the Hungarian Front was joined by the NPP, and its activity was supported by some trade union leaders and representatives of the Christian churches.

The Hungarian Front was not even adverse to temporarily including Horthy himself in a broad national united front. There were two reasons for this. In the autumn of 1944 Horthy himself was compelled to seek contact with the parties of the Hungarian Front which were the only force that could be politically relied on. The parties of the Hungarian Front felt that their own forces were not strong enough to carry through a break with Hitler and in this case with Horthy, too. However, together with Horthy, and his political and military supporters who wanted the change, and with the aid of the Soviet army, it would have been realistic to turn against the Nazis.

In the autumn of 1944 the Hungarian Front sent Horthy two memoranda. In these it outlined those conditions which could serve as a basis for cooperation and "ensure the future and honor of the Hungarian people on the side of the victorious democratic great powers and in alliance with the small peoples of the Danubian Basin".⁴¹ The communist party, almost simultaneously with the presentation of these memoranda, called on the Hungarian people, on those who were concerned with the future of the nation, who "sincerely and honestly love their people" to join the Hungarian Front.⁴²

The communists, while working for broad national unity, did everything in their power to increase the political weight of the working masses, and in particular, that of the working class in the united front. As a result, the KMP and the SzDP concluded an agreement for united action in early October 1944. The agreement for unity of action fixed the common tasks of the two parties in the fight against Hitler, and in the period of the reconstruction of the country as well. This document of united action was among the first in the international working-class

⁴⁰ PI Archives, pamphlet and leaflet collection, III. 18/1944/IV/2373/1

⁴¹ For the two memoranda sent to Horthy see *Dokumentumok a magyar forradalmi munkásmozgalom történetéből 1935–1945* (Documents of the History of the Hungarian Revolutionary Working-Class Movement 1935–1945) pp. 545–547 and 548–551, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1964.

⁴² Op. cit., p. 544.

movement which laid down "the need for the unification of the two parties in order to form a unified and single revolutionary socialist workers' party".⁴³

However, opposition to the Germans and going over to the side of the anti-fascist allies was prevented by a new intervention by the Germans on October 15, 1944; Horthy was pushed aside, and, with their aid, Szálasi's Arrow Cross regime was established. Since Horthy broke the preliminary armistice agreement of October 11, 1944 with the Soviet Union, reneged on the responsibilities he had undertaken in his talks with the Hungarian Front and had not made preparations for the *volte-face*, the attempt at withdrawing from the Nazi war, which had been planned for mid-October, did not succeed.

Following the Nazi *coup d'état* which helped the Arrow Cross to power, another attempt was made to rally the anti-Hitler forces and oppose the Nazis under the chairmanship of Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky. The Liberation Committee of the Hungarian National Revolt which was established in early November called for an armed uprising, and prepared the plans and their practical execution for the liberation of Budapest. The Liberation Committee, even though formed late and under much less favourable condition than before, embraced broader popular forces – the KMP, the SzDP, the NPP, the FKGP, in other words the parties of the Hungarian Front, as well as the Liberation Front of Hungarian Youth, which represented the patriotic forces of the Hungarian Youth, many illegal anti-German petty-bourgeois and intellectual groups such as the Freedom Association of Hungarian Patriots, the Hungarian Association of Friends of the Soviet Union, the Hungarian March Association, the anti-fascist supporters of the paper *Ellenállás*, along with Horthyist groups, and anti-German military groups, primarily of officers who supported Horthy. Although the tasks laid down in the programme of the Liberation Committee were not realized because of the arrest of their leaders in late November, this short-lived alliance nevertheless proved that the programme of the communists, which had defined the circle of the permanent and, during the period of the anti-Hitler fight for freedom, potential temporary allies, was the only expedient policy which could be realistically applied in the given situation.

In the final analysis this policy based on broad cooperation made it possible for factory owner and worker, clerk and engineer, leader and led to cooperate in preventing the dismantling of plants and factories, and the evacuation of cities. At the initiative of the communist party the communists and social democrats called on the factory, the city, the village leaders to cooperate in defending the factory or plant, and in preventing the evacuation of the population. And in the majority of instances this cooperation was successful. As a result of this cooperation representatives of all strata of Hungarian society took part alongside the communists in the armed partisan battles, even if this did not turn into a general armed uprising.

In the final stage of the struggle against Hitler the alliance policy elaborated by the KMP came to full fruition in the national committees set up in the areas liberated by the Soviet army, and in the Provisional National Assembly which convened in December 1944, and then in the activities of the provisional national government. In its main lines this policy formed the basis of communist activities in the fight for the democratic transformation of the country as well.

⁴³ Op. cit., pp. 561–565.

The Communist Movement and the National Minorities Question (1919-1945)

by

Dániel Csatári

"It is not that I am proud of being a Hungarian, but my being undeniably Hungarian does help me in this maddening situation and of that, I am proud", wrote Endre Ady, one of the greatest Hungarian poets. "In this Shakespearean, grave situation, a nation, which allows one of its finest sons to see the humanity that is Man and adhere to a superb internationalism during these most austere of times, heavily burdened by its Magyarism as it is, is a nation with a future. Any nation, which can afford to take an internationalist stand today has a winning cause."¹

When Ady wrote these lines on January 24, 1915, history had presented once again in a tragic way the question "to be or not to be" to the peoples living together in the Danubian basin. Ady, who had more than once voiced the common sorrows of the Hungarians, Rumanians and Slavs, pointed towards the future as the way out from the blind passions that sprang from the social conflicts of centuries.

The belief that the collaboration of Hungarians, Rumanians and Slavs will be brought about under the banner of internationalism rested on already existing social grounds. The working class came into being as a product of capitalism and had embarked on the road of historical undertakings. The social conditions for its existence, which were internationalist in character, its ideology, its internationalism and emotions, the solidarity, which for the first time the working class elevated to a conscious and constant historical force, all attested to the fact that this is the class capable of developing a new relationship between the various nationalities.

It is common knowledge that, following the First World War, pre-1918 Hungary had ceased to exist and that new states came simultaneously into being in Eastern Europe. This was progress compared to the previous situation, but it produced new tensions in the sphere of national and national minority problems and this was mainly because the forces of international capitalism had blocked the possibility of such popular socialist solutions of the East European nationality question as indicated by the Hungarian Republic of Councils and the revolutionary labour movements which followed in the wake of the Great October Socialist Revolution.

Bourgeois concepts and the further oppression of the minorities could not provide a solution because the victorious imperialist powers, setting new boundaries,

¹ Ady, E.: *A nacionalizmus alkonya* (The Twilight of Nationalism), p. 233, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1959.

had drawn up peace treaties that were detrimental to the popular movements and the defeated, according to the new variations of the traditional divide-and-rule policy. The "might makes right" policy suppressed demands for self-determination, which still existed at first, and created new forms of oppression of the minorities, oppression by bringing national exclusiveness and a principle of aggressive nationalism to dominance. Being ethnically mixed not only strengthened the population's awareness of their interdependence but it also made it easier for the imperialists to succeed in setting against each other peoples who were living together. One camp sought to maintain the new situation through the support of certain groups of the imperialist powers, while the other hoped for a change in the *status quo* through the strengthening of the defeated imperialist powers. Thus had the new situation brought conflicts between Hungary, which had regained its independence, and her neighbours, allied in the 'Little Entente', and, with it, the preconditions for their political and economic dependency.

Though the roles had been reversed, the centuries-old oppression continued. This sprang from the social circumstances of bourgeois development which was still encumbered by the remnants of feudalism. Following from a policy of forced assimilation, class oppression frequently paralleled the oppression of national minorities. *Politically*, this strengthened separatist efforts; in *economic policy* it was expressed through concepts of self-sufficiency; and *ideologically* it strengthened tendencies toward national autocracy and gave rise to conflicts between various nationalities.

Regarding the objective social contradictions, the struggle of the various nationalist tendencies could create the illusion that, just as throughout our whole history, it was the invariable fate of Hungarians, Rumanians and Slavs to be at odds with one another.

The Hungarian ruling classes, intent on saving and conserving their power, endeavoured to exploit these contradictions in their own interests, stressing those aspects of the Versailles peace treaties² which extended the influence of nationalist ideologies and ensured their broadest propagation. As so often before, the ruling classes again presented their interests as being that of the nation as a whole. Thus, they continued to make any solution of the country's fundamental problems impossible. Horthy's fascism excluded the people from the political life of the nation and also kept them at the level of social misery which had prevailed for centuries. Superstition, prejudice and obscurantism were the prescribed spiritual diet of the people, reducing their self-will so that they were rendered incapable of altering their circumstances.

Commenting on the situation, Count Miklós Bánffy, the first Minister of Foreign Affairs in the István Bethlen government and who later returned to Transylvania to play a positive role in organizing progressive literary trends, wrote: "I have been observing with increasing anxiety that despite the catastrophe which had struck our people, nobody has wanted to take cognizance of the evils which brought us to that point. Nobody has drawn a full portrait of all those things which the political ruling classes had failed to do during the decades prior to

² The Trianon Peace Treaty (June 4, 1920), the imperialist peace dictate after the First World War, was concluded between the Allied and Associated Powers and Hungary. It was part of the Versailles peace settlements.

the First World War, and nobody has drawn the lessons of this. Nobody has shed light on the mountain of lies which have poisoned Hungarian public opinion and created apathy in the pre-war period toward any kind of reality. Nobody had said: Walk this path no longer! Nobody had warned out people to become educated, and face reality. We had seen the day when we were again abandoning all self-criticism and recognition of reality, once more reverting to that ideology which had dominated Hungary before the outbreak of the world war. We seek in others the source of all troubles and errors, and overlook our own vices."³

The Hungarian landowner and capitalist classes thus succeeded in perpetuating the concept according to which there was a deep chasm between the nation and the people, in counterposing national strivings with the interests of progress and thus splitting the unity of the democratic forces and reducing national sentiment to provincialism.

As a result, fantasy had once more triumphed over facts and wishful thinking over concepts based on realistic considerations. Accordingly, our tragic failures were never attributed to changes in the international balance of power, not to the real situation which had developed despite our efforts, but rather always to treason. The political attitude of the ruling classes nourished vanity and braggartism, as Miklós Bánffy noted in his above quoted work, and conjured up the image of a suffering Messiah, so that rather than those creating things of enduring worth becoming the example it was those who were martyrs of their own enterprises. That is how failure and popularity, tragedy and sympathy, martyrdom and destiny came to be associated and continued to feed public opinion which in any case had always been susceptible to self-delusion.

The Hungarian governments were helped by the fact that as a result of the policy of the bourgeois governments of the neighbouring countries, most of the Hungarians living there – and this was true of the relatively most liberal Czechoslovak Republic as well – suffered not only social oppression but also national discrimination.

Bourgeois Hungarian parties active in the neighbouring countries and always in close conformity with the prevailing policies of the Hungarian governments, gave voice to these grievances, projecting themselves as the defenders of the rights of "national minorities".⁴ Their politics were determined by their class composition, which an earlier publicist described as follows: "The base was not of the working masses, but was made up of the churches, the landowning class, the intelligentsia and those bank (economic-capitalist) cartels that had survived intact."⁵ For this reason, the official Hungarian parties had uniformly presented the nationalities – the majority of the masses of which suffered from similar social oppression as the labouring masses of Hungarians – as the cause of the grievances that stemmed

³ OL, Ráday Archives, *The Miklós Bánffy Papers*, IV/c.

⁴ For a more detailed examination see Rehák, L.: *A kisebbségek Jugoszláviában* (The National Minorities in Yugoslavia), Forum, Novi Sad, 1967; Arató, E.: *A magyar-csehszlovák viszony 50 éve* (Fifty Years of Relations between Hungary and Czechoslovakia), Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1969; Csátrai, D.: *Román-magyar kapcsolatok. Történelmi vázlat* (Rumanian-Hungarian Relations. A Historical Outline), Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1958.

⁵ Szász, B.: *Nemzetiségpolitikánk válsága. A dunai kérdés* (The Crisis of our National Minorities Policy. The Danube Question), pp. 42–43, Attila, Budapest, 1932.

from the suppression of national minorities. But while inciting opinion against "Rumanians", "Czechoslovaks" and "Yugoslavs", the leaders of the Hungarian parties often negotiated with the bourgeois Rumanian, Yugoslav and other governments, which were responsible for the oppression of national minorities, whenever their common class-interests so dictated.

In such an extraordinarily complex situation, when the various nationalisms deepened the divisions between peoples who were fundamentally dependent on each other, it was not easy to work out a political line which would establish clear class fronts.

The Hungarian communists, having a global outlook, worked on the formulation of such a political concept. They condemned the first imperialist peace treaties as an instrument designed to divide the peoples but at the same time they also exposed the class character of the nationalist agitation carried out by the Hungarian ruling classes using the peace treaty as a pretext. "The Hungarian ruling classes blamed vile Austria and played out the whole constitutional rigmarole in a manoeuvre to hold the peasantry and to divert from themselves any responsibility for the despair caused by mass misery", wrote the *Kommün*. "The peace treaty, accepted by the white government, has now assumed this role. The peace treaty of the capitalist Entente robbers has created real degradation and misery on both sides of the Hungarian border, but only for the working masses. The exploiters in both the victorious and the vanquished states have everywhere obtained all they had hoped for. Never before has there been such a harvest for the capitalist, landowning, banking and clerical parasites as in the price-rigging, corrupt paradise of dismembered Hungary. The price of all this is being sweated out of the blood of the Hungarian proletariat in the factory and on the land, who, if he dares but groan under the hellish burden, is muzzled with the humbug of territorial integrity... The Peace of Trianon is the cause of unemployment, because it deprived us of those territories where our agricultural labourers had found work in the past, whereas everyone still remembers the very opposite, that formerly they fetched harvest hands from Northern Hungary and Transylvania to the Great Plains, that it was workers from the split-off territories themselves who worked here and frequently enough as strike breakers at the command of the Hungarian gentry."⁶

At the same time, the Hungarian communists were not unaware that the new situation was creating new tensions. The *Kommün*, for example, kept track of and condemned the contradictions which stemmed from the autarkic economic policy. "What follows from all this is, of course, not the necessity for integration, nor the reestablishment of the Austria or Hungary of old, but the need for such an economic system where borders do not signify economic isolation, where they are not a weapon of murderous competition, but merely signposts of the autonomy of national cultures and as such presuppose close economic cooperation", wrote the paper on August 2, 1922.

This internationalist world outlook, in outlining the conditions of rapprochement based on the mutual interests of the opposing countries and the class conscious concept of nation and nationality – according to the demands of internationalism – pointed to the hitherto neglected historic and positive role of the

⁶ "A trianoni bűnbak" (The Trianon Scapegoat), *Kommün*, July 11, 1922.

Soviet Union and the proletariat of neighbouring countries. "A national policy can be taken seriously only if it is independent, if it is not committed to any one of the imperialist powers", wrote József Révai. "Imperialism as an ally gives nothing for free; if the imperialist competitor offers more tomorrow, then, without further ado, it sacrifices the national interests of the allied small nations. Therefore, complete independence in foreign affairs and an alliance with Russia is today virtually the essence of a national foreign policy. This is the only national policy that is also realistic."⁷ Révai proved this by showing that this alliance, which is inseparable from the alliance with the workers of the neighbouring states, is the only effective guarantee and aid in the fight for the national liberation of the Hungarian national minorities. "The irreconcilable imperialist conflicts", the Party's organ stated, "conceal a great community of interests; the community of interests of the proletarians of Hungary and the successor states."⁸ By indicating the class-forces that opposed national-nationality oppression, the Hungarian communists, in harmony with a similar stand by the fraternal parties, took these problems out of the blind alley into which the struggles of various nationalisms had taken it. The idea of international solidarity was embodied in the common struggle of the workers of the majority and the minority nationalities in Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia. The organized workers who were welded together regardless of their ethnic origin showed the practice and successful way of defending nationality rights. This ripened the seed of a united front of national progressive forces which subsequently was to take firmer and more visible form in the period of the popular front policy.

The role played in this process by those Hungarian communists who had emigrated from the white terror to the neighbouring countries should not be underestimated. The Hungarian political police reported on June 8, 1925: "After the failure of the Commune in Budapest, the slogan was that all those young workers who face the danger of arrest should without fail emigrate to Czechoslovakia, because there, on the one hand, they will have excellent opportunities to carry out propaganda, and, on the other hand, the communist young workers' organizations in each town are so strong and closely interconnected that the emigrants can find employment and be able to engage in further propaganda work. Those who had been young-worker leaders during the Commune were the first to cross the border in large numbers, and later as well when the cell structure was discovered and they feared arrest."⁹

The Czechoslovak workers did, in fact, welcome their Hungarian brothers and ensure their protection, and they in turn, at the side of and together with their local companions, fought many battles, in this way also strengthening the revolutionary left-wing working-class movement. Mention should be made of at least one example of this rich source of proletarian solidarity. The *Kassai Munkás*, for example, was the only one of all the Czechoslovak workers' newspaper in the Hungarian language to popularize Lenin's ideas and it did all it could to make known Czech and Slovak progressive writers.

⁷ Révai, J.: "Trianon – Genf – Moszkva" (Trianon–Geneva–Moscow), *Új Március*, July–August 1925, p. 31.

⁸ "Magyar Lokarnó" (Hungarian Locarno), *Új Március*, March–April 1926.

⁹ The Political Investigation Group of the Budapest Headquarters of the Hungarian Royal State Police. Report of June 8, 1925, p. 48, PI Arch., fond 651, 13/9.

Much the same situation prevailed in Rumania and Yugoslavia, where Hungarian communist emigres aided the realization of the internationalist unity of the workers of different languages, as they did on every battle-field of the class struggle. The many common struggles proved to the non-socialists of the individual nationalities that international working class solidarity, to which they were averse, also protects national minority rights, and that, irrespective of ethnic origins, the organized working class points to the real possibilities of national self-defence. "The Hungarian working class of Transylvania found the most understanding of its needs and rights as a national minority in the ranks of the Rumanian Socialist Party, particularly amongst its left wing. The guarantee of minority rights is a part of the programme of the socialist party of every country. This circumstance is an additional reason why the Hungarian worker, apart from his own proletarian interests, by virtue of his interests as a member of the national minorities, should be the most loyal and persistent militant of the united trade-union movement forming the left wing of the Rumanian Socialist Party. This socialist or proletarian consciousness explains why the Hungarian workers make up the left-wing of the Rumanian Socialist Party."¹⁰

The support given for the international unity of workers speaking various languages by no means excluded but rather presupposed that the Hungarian communists reckoned with those national conditions from which the proletariat set out towards the implementation of international perspectives. "This is the sort of question", József Révai stated, "to which the working class, which is preparing to assume the leadership of all working people, cannot be indifferent or neutral. Whether or not the Hungarian working class will be able to become the leading class of the peoples' revolution against the ruling clique of landowners and finance capitalists will largely depend on whether it will take a correct theoretical and practical position on the Hungarian national question."¹¹

The First Congress of the Hungarian Party of Communists, held in 1925, was an important station in this "reckoning", in its interaction with the intellectual efforts of the international revolutionary working-class movement and in connection with the resolution determining the tasks of the Hungarian Party of Communists (KMP). This Congress, which still regarded the proletarian revolution as being imminent, gave considerable attention to the problems of democracy and the vestiges of feudalism.

The same intellectual endeavours began to emerge in the Socialist Workers' Party of Hungary (MSzMP) (1925-1928),¹² when, in practical politics as well, the fight for democratic demands to prepare the way for the socialist revolution became stronger. A growing number of articles and studies appeared which sought to make the kind of analysis of the given social structure and political situation in the country which, within the revolutionary process as a whole, facilitated the setting of realistic tasks for the struggle of the given period. There was an increasing awareness then that one could not dismiss bourgeois democracy with a disdainful wave of the hand. The importance of the peasant question was stressed, pointing

¹⁰ Jancsó, B.: "Szocialista mozgalom Romániában" (The Socialist Movement in Rumania), *Magyar Szemle*, September 1929, pp. 70-71.

¹¹ Révai, J.: "Trianon-Genf-Moszkva".

¹² See Ágnes Szabó's study in this volume.

to the harmful role of the feudal remnants, and to the possibilities inherent in petty-bourgeois democracy.

Initially, these endeavours determined the preparatory work for the Second Congress of the KMP in 1928. György Lukács, the internationally known Marxist philosopher, was delegated to prepare a political program which came to be known as the "Blum Theses". He was convinced after analyzing the Hungarian situation that the KMP was correct in the mid-20s when it issued the slogan 'Fight for a Republic!' This expressed the fact that in Hungary, even in the event of a government crisis, a direct transition to a socialist revolution would be impossible without the implementation of democratic demands and without creating an alliance of the class forces concerned.

These pioneer intellectual efforts, however, came to nought. Lukács's draft thesis was rejected outright. However, it would be a mistake to seek the reason for this critical attitude in personal or subjective factors, just as it would be a vulgarization merely to attribute it to dogmatism. The reasons were far more complex and were related to the important fact that the depression had sharpened the contradictions to the extent that the proletarian revolution had become a real possibility in a number of countries. However, the fact that universal validity was imputed to what was real in some areas, indicated above all that the concrete situation in Hungary had not been scientifically evaluated, nor had the proper consequences been drawn.

Here lies the explanation as to why the KMP, for instance, at its Second Congress in 1930, once again viewed the proletarian revolution as the direct and central objective, excluding the democratic transition.

Though the Hungarian communists in their cognition of reality were unable to avoid detours, dead-ends, mistakes and incorrect conceptions, the rational elements of a realistic and constructive solution had already made their appearance at the time in its progress. The final deciding factor of the work of any movement of historical significance is the extent to which it is able to embody the essential trends of historical processes. The test of their strength is the extent to which they are able to transform reality, being in close and constant reciprocity with the current of historical reality. Amidst the conditions of Horthy-fascism, when the most experienced leaders of the KMP were in forced emigration, this was a very complicated task.

Bearing these conditions in mind we can state that the Hungarian communists correctly expressed many essential tendencies during the years of the world economic crisis. Thus, they were of that small minority which in no uncertain terms exposed the nationalist incitement of feelings by the Hungarian ruling classes against the Soviet Union and neighbouring peoples. The Hungarian communists, counteracting this poison, made the peace policy of the Soviet Union known and also the achievements of the new society in the process of construction which gave rise to its peace policy.

Worthy of attention is the fact that information, free of deliberate distortions, on the role and struggle of the Soviet Union also penetrated the ranks of the Hungarian intelligentsia. This was reflected in a book about the Soviet Union by Gyula Illyés, the outstanding representative of the populist writers, which prominent representatives of the Hungarian intellectuals welcomed with sympathy and joy. György Bálint, an outstanding Hungarian Marxist publicist, wrote that Illyés

"does not see things as being given but as a process of unceasing tension and struggle of opposites". "So much warmth, so much cheerful sympathy, so much intelligent participation, good will and objective criticism; our best sons wrote about the Hungarian people as Illyés wrote about the Russians", wrote Antal Szerb in his review. "The reader is caught up in an irresistible Rousseau-like desire to become a simple but enthusiastic worker in a Moscow screw factory or the Dnyepetrovsk power station."¹³

Similarly, truth and understanding characterized the opinion of the Hungarian communist and progressive forces about the Hungarian government's nationalist and chauvinist agitation against the neighbouring peoples. The movement for territorial revision was not a national but an imperialist one. *Új Március* wrote that the remedy for the grievances of the national minority masses should not be sought in this way and not even within the scope of the League of Nations, which is impotent and chaotic, but in an alliance with the workers of the dominant nation, as had already been realized in many neighbouring countries, and which had proved to be a means of defending nationality rights. Just as the Hungarian communists in their fight against Hungarian nationalism served the rapprochement of the peoples living side by side, so did the brother parties by exposing their own ruling classes' policy of national oppression. For example, Gábor Steiner, a Czechoslovak communist and member of parliament, said in his parliamentary speech on November 28, 1930: "Of all the unsolved problems, the question of the minorities proved to be the most difficult to solve, and threatens to explode... The Hungarian working people engage in struggle not against the national independence of the Czech and Slovak working people, but rather in fraternal unity with them, so as to further the liberation of the working people as a whole. The Hungarian working people want – as a free nation, to enjoy equal rights and, of their own volition to form fraternal friendship with the Czech working people within the framework of a socialist soviet republic. The Hungarian proletariat therefore fights most tenaciously against the Hungarian bourgeoisie and against the fomenting of national hatred."¹⁴

This consistent internationalist policy of safeguarding national minority rights played an important role in the fact that the majority of the Hungarian working people in Slovakia supported the Czechoslovak Communist Party and participated in its struggle. The extent of this is indicated by the 1929 election when the Czechoslovak Communist Party obtained more than 1,000,000 votes as against 300,000 for the bourgeois nationalist Hungarian parties.

While the fraternal alliance of Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, German and Ruthenian working people deepened, a political process set in, growing stronger during the crisis years, amongst the Hungarians of Czechoslovakia, in which mainly the peasantry and certain sections of the petty-bourgeoisie rejected the policy of the official Hungarian parties directed from Budapest.

One of the most significant of the pioneering movements was the "Sarló" (Sickle) the Hungarian youth movement in Czechoslovakia, more precisely in

¹³ *Nyugat*, No. 2, 1934, pp. 503–506 and *Erdélyi Helikon*, No. 10, 1934, pp. 798–799.

¹⁴ Holotikova, Z.: *Steiner Gábor. Egy forradalmár élete* (Gábor Steiner. The Life of a Revolutionary). pp. 184–187, Politikai Könyvkiadó, Bratislava, 1963.

Slovakia. This movement gave organized form to the ideas of the Hungarian generation in Czechoslovakia which was coming to maturity in the decade following the First World War, which broke with the Hungarian and other nationalist currents of the time and looked to socialism for an answer to its problems and those of the other peoples amongst which it lived. The class composition and social base of the "Sarló", determining its intellectual direction, was by no means immaterial. The generation of intellectuals who had grown up after the First World War were mainly the children of the petty-bourgeois, workers, peasants and of the *declassé* middle class whose links with the old world were tenuous. Not having profited from it, starting out from the general sentiment of the social strata from which it originated, it found it easier to turn its back on illusions about a revival of the Hungarian empire which had failed. There was a basic contradiction between this strata's understanding of social reality, with its relative popular dynamism, and the irredentist policy which called for passive resistance by the Hungarians in the neighbouring countries. Those who recognised the changed objective circumstances had to fight against the various legends and national and religious myths which the conservatives, reactionaries and forces of restoration spread in Hungary.

This explains why the generation of the "Sarló" was able to challenge the old barriers, reservations and engrained opinions more boldly than any earlier generation. They had experienced the reactionary character of Hungarian nationalism in their own environment. From this followed the demand of this generation for broader horizons of orientation; they accepted all ideas which they held to be right and true and which served the common interests of Hungarians and non-Hungarians.

Though it was easier to reject the old, it was all the more difficult to create the conditions for the new orientation. Would it be possible to formulate a policy of defending minority rights based on national requirements, while breaking with morbid nationalist ideas, a policy that could loosen the strangle hold of various nationalisms? The "Sarló" was helped, in giving a positive answer, by the recognition that it was not the Hungarian feudal classes – responsible for the national catastrophe – who represented the interests of the nation, but the people, who, despite having been dispossessed, had earlier braved the storms of history. This interpretation of the Hungarian problem – and it is not difficult to discern Ady's influence here – helped this generation to surmount the narrow horizons of nationalism and opened up internationalist perspectives to them. The concept of nation, which had been developed in opposition to the old-fashioned scholasticism, approximated the recognition that their own people shared the lot of the other peoples with whom they lived, and if their situation was a common one, then their being in conflict could be fatal.

Apart from the ideological help and criticism with which the communists and primarily *Zoltán Fábry*¹⁵ contributed to the development of the world outlook of the "Sarló", two significant events hastened this process of change.

¹⁵ Fábry, Z. (1897–1970) was the editor of *Az Út*, a periodical published in Bratislava in the 1930s and one of the organizers of Hungarian literary life in Slovakia.

The "Sarló" movement decided to send two of its leaders, János Terebessy and Imre Vargha to Budapest so that on March 15, 1930, the anniversary of the 1848 Revolution, they would place a wreath at the statue of Sándor Petőfi displaying the national colours of the various East European peoples as well as red ribbons. The Budapest police prohibited the wreath-laying and thereupon another leading member of the "Sarló", Kálmán Brogyáni, travelled to Budapest and, in the company of István Farkas, a social democrat MP, placed a wreath at the tomb of Mihály Táncsics.¹⁶

Nationalist public opinion was outraged, and the "Sarló" movement was accused in the Hungarian House of Representatives of "submitting" to Czechoslovak government-policy. From then on the Hungarian political police kept them under surveillance.

The shots fired by the police in Kosut (Nemeskosut, Kasuty pri Galaude) also resulted in radicalizing the movement. Members of the "Sarló" wanted to take part in a meeting of Hungarian peasants held in this small village at Whitsun 1931. The police, however, fired on the assembled peasants and arrested István Major, a communist deputy, who was to have addressed the meeting. It became clear that nothing could be expected of the Czechoslovak Republic either.

But what could they expect from the Czech and Slovak people? The "Sarló" got the answer to that question at its 1931 Congress, held in Bratislava between September 24 and 29, at which Julius Fucik, the hero and martyr of the Second World War, participated, addressing the meeting as the representative of the Czechoslovak Communist Party: "You are fighting for national liberation," he said, "and against national oppression. You have found the right course if you are aware that this struggle for liberation is the cause of the revolutionary proletariat. You should know that the Czech workers and working peasants are at your side, at the side of Hungarian workers and working peasants. You have come to know the Czech gendarmes and the Czech bailiffs, the instruments of oppression. Well, you ought also to get to know those who are your allies, who know it is their duty to fight at your side. Not only you Hungarian intellectuals fight in the ranks of the Hungarian proletariat for the national liberation of Hungarians, we workers and intellectuals of Prague, Brno, Hradec and Ostrava also fight for the national liberation of Hungarians as do the millions belonging to other oppressed nations. Our greetings are at the same time a festive report of our presence in that international united front which, step by step, though suffering losses, proceeds victoriously towards freedom!"¹⁷

Thus at that time too, socialism was the only way for those working for a rapprochement of the East European peoples to overcome contradictions and bring into harmony nation with progress, and national with international points of view.

¹⁶ Táncsics, M. (1799–1884), a writer, journalist and politician of serf parentage, a petty-bourgeois socialist, a supporter of national independence and the liberation of the serfs, a representative of the interests of the poor peasantry and the working class. The people of Pest freed him from jail at the outbreak of the 1848 Revolution. On the extreme left wing of the revolutionary movement at the time of 1848–1849 bourgeois democratic revolution, in 1869 he joined the General Workers' Society, the first political organization of the Hungarian working class, and was elected its chairman. He has become a symbol of the traditions of the 1848–1849 Revolution.

¹⁷ Balogh, E.: *Hétpróba. Egy nemzedék elindul* (Seven Tests. A Generation on the March), p. 275, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1965.

"We of the 'Sarló' movement are revolutionary socialists, but this does not mean that we have made a choice between national and international points of view" one document states. "We are Hungarians by birth and language and it was in the course of the class struggle, in the interests of the Hungarian working class and peasantry, that we came to oppose national and class oppression. We demand national self-determination, and we ask you who emphasize national slogans so often, to demand this as well, by fighting against nationalist phrases. Our internationalism also derives from our situation. Czech workers fight for our interests as well, against the very same forces which also squeeze the Hungarian minority workers. We therefore stand for solidarity with the Czech working class. Nationhood and internationalism are indivisible if we want free nations and a liberated working people."¹⁸

The Budapest political police, basing themselves on facts gathered during their surveillance of the "Sarló" movement, had every reason to fear that the hand holding the hammer in the sickle emblem would also take the hand of a fellow militant extended towards it.¹⁹ The above-mentioned Congress of the "Sarló" movement was welcomed by *Társadalmi Szemle* (the legal organ of the KMP) with the joy due to a comrade-in-arms, though it was also critical. The communists made no thorough analysis of the basically sound steps taken by the "Sarló" though this would have been highly necessary in order for the KMP to have a better understanding of the experiences derived from the activities of the "Sarló" movement and of the real social and national minority conceptions of the non-proletarian sections of the people. Instead, they condemned them for their experiences concerning the nationality question and for their ideas which had in fact enriched the understanding of the revolutionary working-class movement on the nationality question. At the same time, they highly praised such incorrect views which maintained that certain stages of development such as the democratic land reform could be by-passed, the social, conscious and political requisites of which could be created by historical development only at a much later stage and under completely different conditions. These were a part of the national question. The Hungarian language paper of the Czechoslovak Communist Party wrote that: "At the time of the 'Sarló' movement, because of its situation, the party in its everyday practice did not give due consideration to the nationality question which was a very important problem of the Hungarian people and particularly of the petty-bourgeoisie".²⁰

Though the majority in the "Sarló" movement arrived at a more complete understanding of the main lines of social development, those who were unable to keep up with it lost contact or fell by the wayside. The movement disintegrated though it could have helped to advance the political awakening of the popular but non-socialist strata, whose support was needed so as not to reduce the chances of a working-class victory.

¹⁸ Op. cit., p. 318.

¹⁹ *A magyarországi bolsevista mozgalmak 1931 május elsejétől 1932 októberéig* (The Bolshevik Movements in Hungary from May 1, 1931 to October 1932). Report No. XXXV of the Political Investigating Section of the Budapest Headquarters of the State Police, Budapest, November, 1932, p. 43 and pp. 96–98. PI Archives, fond 561, 13–4.

²⁰ 'Regarding the "Sarló" debate', *Magyar Nap*, June 16, 1937.

In Rumania during this period the fifth Congress of the Rumanian Communist Party²¹ helped those who had become disillusioned with the Hungarian Party²² and were looking for a way out. The Rumanian communists sought to have the oppositionist sentiment, which was developing in the Hungarian ranks, become the driving force of the democratic revolution, then an accepted part of the tasks, and for it to create its own legal political framework. That is how the opposition in the Hungarian Party came about in 1933, and then in the summer of 1934 in Tirgu Mures (Marosvásárhely) its independent organization, the National Federation of Hungarian Working People (MADOSZ). The MADOSZ organized the rallying of the democratic Hungarians in Rumania, and the fight against the oppression of national minorities. It fought for the rights of the Hungarian language and culture, for the use of the Hungarian language in the administration, for the reinstatement of victimised workers and officials and for a democratic land reform. But not in the spirit of the sabre-rattling official Hungarian foreign policy of the chauvinist Gömbös government, but on the basis of cooperation with the Rumanian people.

However, not every current and trend which had split away from the Hungarian Party got as far as the Rumanian Communist Party. Thus, for example, certain trends of the middle sector, the most prominent representatives of which were the writers Károly Kós and Géza Tabéry and the journalist Miklós Krenner (writing under the *nom de plume* Spectator) criticized the policy of the Hungarian Party which disregarded the possibilities of exploring new ways and making a new start.

These were the discerning views which had been proclaimed by almost all of the new generation of Hungarians in Rumania at the beginning of the thirties. It was then that the generation which still sat at their school desks at the time of the historical changes following the First World War, had matured. This youth, most of whom rose from the ranks of the people, was less bound by conservative political traditions than the previous generation. They opposed the conservative leadership of the Hungarian Party much more sharply and with a vehemence fed by the vigour of their youth. They became aware of the bankruptcy of the Hungarian Party's method of leadership, of the lack of perspective of its revisionist policy and at the same time of the need for the co-existence and understanding of the Rumanians and Hungarians of Transylvania. Therefore, they demanded a realis-

²¹ The Fifth Congress of the Rumanian Communist Party was held in January 1931. Its resolutions set the tasks for the completion of the bourgeois democratic revolution and the transition to a socialist revolution. In its policy of alliances the peasantry was pointed to as the main ally of the working class. Stress was put on the need to eliminate remnants of feudalism that weighed heavily on the peasantry, and to divide up the large estates among the landless and poor peasants. Guided by the Marxist principle that "no nation can be free if it oppresses others", the Fifth Congress set the fight against national oppression and for equal political economic and cultural rights of the minorities as a basic party task.

²² National Hungarian Party, a conservative, nationalist party, founded in Kolozsvár in 1922 when two earlier Hungarian parties, the Hungarian National Party and the Hungarian People's Party united. Its leaders were Samu Jósika up to 1923, István Ugron between 1923 and 1926 and Count György Bethlen from 1926 to 1938 when the party was dissolved.

tic policy towards the minorities and social progress and were able to visualize their future only in solidarity and in collaboration with the working masses.²³

Their brave critical concepts, which provoked much attack, was characterized in September 1933 by the writer Áron Tamási: "In Transylvania we are not Hungarians in fomenting hostility between religious denominations, we are not Hungarians in upholding the feudal estate system, we are not Hungarians in protecting the capitalist bank policy and we are not Hungarians in the pursuit and acceptance of cheap and harmful irredentism."²⁴

These intellectual currents in Rumania were, however, unable to reach the point of cooperation with the working class, as were the similar varied trends in Hungary, searching for a new orientation. These included the Miklós Bartha Society, the Youth of Szeged, the Wesselényi Reform Club,²⁵ the official university student organization, MEFHOSZ. The Patriotic Organization of Hungarian University and College Students and the youth of the Eötvös College.²⁶

The Hungarian communists recognized the sound aspects of these movements and they wished to strengthen the correct aims of the intellectuals' orientation towards the proletarian movement. *Társadalmi Szemle* summed up the major mistakes of the "Rural Research Movement of Szeged University Youth" under the following three points:

"1. Even now they still wish to take the culture of the ruling classes to the "people", which the latter "unfortunately" is without. — They do this rather than further the creation of a proletarian culture in a truly new spirit.

2. They still hope for support from "above", they have not yet relinquished the idea of shaking up "public opinion" and of convincing the powers that be, though this may well lead to the inevitable deterioration of their work.

3. The movement undoubtedly expends itself mainly in "cultural" work and this from the outset makes it impossible to engage in cultural work in a genuinely new spirit because this can be accomplished only if it is bound up with a comprehensive liberation struggle of the working class and of the poor peasantry, otherwise precisely that which is essential will be lost. The decisive events of this struggle indicate the direction; and the rate of progress can only be maintained in the fire of battle. The agrarian settlement movement possesses the necessary im-

²³ This was evidenced by *Az Erdélyi Fiatalok Falufüzetei* (The Village Pamphlets of the Transylvanian Youth). The young intellectuals rallying around the magazine *Erdélyi Fiatalok* started a rural-research movement in 1930. The study prepared on the living conditions of the peasants was published in the independent series of the *Az Erdélyi Fiatalok Falufüzetei*. The differentiation that had set in without the circle's world outlook resulted in the left wing joining the working-class movement in 1932.

²⁴ Tamási, Á.: *Virrasztás* (Vigil), pp. 164–165, Révai Kiadó, Budapest, 1943.

²⁵ Organizations of young professional people in Hungary, who had become disillusioned with the ideology of the counter-revolutionary system.

²⁶ Founded in 1895 to serve the scientific education of future secondary school teachers. — The following episode illustrates the degree of its political orientation. — A student of linguistics from the Soviet Union, Vassily Litkin, attended the College. From him the other students heard the completely novel idea for them, that there was a connection between national development and internationalism. "The Tsar oppressed us — the Soviet student told his Hungarian colleagues — and suddenly such Russians came who installed electricity and gave us schools in our own language. We were not a nation, it was the internationalists, as you call them, who first raised us to national status. They sent me here to train me to teach Hungarian in the first Komi College of Higher Learning." Cited by Edgar Balogh, op. cit., p. 78.

petus and social foundation to ensure progress. The Budapest report of its leaders made it clear that they recognize the nature of the world situation, and that they sincerely desire a new social system."²⁷ The communists demanded that these movements have an ideological identity, though on the basis of their true role and position they could have been comrades-in-arms, who, in the interest of solving the democratic objectives of the time, could have strengthened the efforts of those opposed to the fascist system. This concept was later asserted against all such non-socialist but populist currents of thought with which it would have been possible to cooperate on the basis of democratic demands.

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In order to form a united front of all intellectual movements that expressed the democratic longings of the socialist working-class movement and the peasantry, it was necessary to develop such a political concept which would elaborate the interconnections between the demands of the socialist and the democratic revolutions in accordance with the requirements of Lenin's theory on permanent revolution.

This political conception had been worked out by the Seventh Congress of the Comintern.

German fascism camouflaged its intentions to dominate the world and to penetrate Eastern Europe by stirring up nationalism and exploiting genuine national grievances. In consequence of the Comintern's Seventh Congress decisions, the East European communist parties, and particularly that of Hungary, had to work out such a popular front policy in this area of Europe which would free the non-socialist Hungarian masses in the neighbouring countries suffering nationality oppression from the influence of growing Hungarian nationalism. This would have advanced their rapprochement with the socialist forces and the democratic currents of the majority peoples which in this complicated nationality situation in Eastern Europe could have precisely defined the task of the way leading to an alliance of the various nationalities.

The KMP was roused to the urgency of these tasks by Hitler's manoeuvring with Hungarian revisionist demands, and by the political efforts of the Hungarian governments who were putting their hopes on Hitler's promises. There were numerous indications, semi-official statements, articles and speeches that made it unambiguously clear that Hungarian revisionism and the situation of the nationalities in Hitler's hand were only instruments to camouflage his imperialistic efforts, but the Hungarian governments nevertheless saw him as the power factor that would redress their grievances.

Following the reestablishment of Soviet-Hungarian diplomatic relations in April 1935, a Hungarian legation was opened in Moscow. Hungary was then able to ascertain at first hand that the Soviet Union harboured no hostile intentions toward it. "It is my general impression" Mihály Arnóthy-Jungerth, the Hungarian Minister in Moscow, reported, "that Litvinov continues to be sympathetic

²⁷ Gereblyés, L.: *Agrár-settlement és "népi kultúra"* (Agrarian Settlement and "Popular Culture"), *Társadalmi Szemle*, April 1932, p. 129.

to Hungary..." One indication of this was when the Ambassador's attention was drawn to the matter of the flags of the 1848-1849 War of Independence which were held by the Soviet Union and which the Hungarian parliamentary opposition had already tried to retrieve in 1914. They suggested to the Hungarian Minister, while he was inspecting these flags, that these might be returned in exchange for the release of political prisoners in Hungary and permission for them to emigrate to the Soviet Union. There was no Hungarian reaction to this proposal, nor to Litvinov's warning of growing German influence.²⁸

Today, it is a well-known historical fact that the Hungarian governments, rather than pursuing the realistic way of defending national interests, accepted and carried out nationalist policies which led to national tragedy. What is not so well-known is the political struggle of the Hungarian, Rumanian and Slovak communists against these conceptions.

Since the Seventh Congress of the Comintern had encouraged the parties to appraise independently the situations in their countries and their own capacities, the parties, among them the KMP, gradually met these new requirements. They adapted their objectives to the circumstance of the given country in conformity with the struggle against fascism, adjusting to the situation amidst which the movement was searching for favourable conditions, methods and forms leading to socialism. Meanwhile, they succeeded in reducing to a 'common denominator' the national interests of the peoples who were undertaking a common struggle within the framework of a programme defining their joint activity which was at the same time in harmony with the universal objectives of social progress.

The Hungarian communists also worked out an internationalist programme of defending national interests which linked the vital problems of the nation to the cause of human progress. By rejecting formulae and schemes that substituted for a proper Marxist analysis of class forces, the political leading force of the Hungarian working class was able to elaborate a concept based on the peculiar conditions prevailing in the country, linking national interests with the broad current of the progressive world.²⁹

The popular front policy of the Hungarian communists for the first time welded together the various democratic currents of Hungarian progressive thought, giving it a universal character and took it into the mainstream of history. This political concept linked the cause of national independence with that of social emancipation. By putting the emphasis on feasible demands for social emancipation, the Party formulated the objectives of the struggle against national and racial oppression and all forms of reaction. This was the point at which it became clear that the Hungarian people's will for national independence and social emancipation could count on the solidarity of the peoples fighting for the freedom of the world. This was the first time in post-1919 Hungary that such a political conception was formulated which was able to express theoretically the way toward the solution of the conflicts between national needs and social progress, and those between the Danubian peoples.

²⁸ Mihály Arnóthy-Jungerth's report of February 29, 1936. OL, Foreign Ministry Papers 50, 482/936.

²⁹ For further details see István Pintér's study in this volume.

The popular front policy accepted by the Seventh Congress did not, however, take final form from one day to the next, just as its application in the given situation of one or another country was the result of a lengthy process. The January 1936 meeting of the Central Committee marked a political turn in the Hungarian Party when it elaborated a "militant democratic programme expressing the common interests of the working people as a whole". As a result, a comradely letter drafted by the Central Committee in January 1936³⁰ unequivocally stated that "We support every party and effort which fights for bourgeois democracy and which seeks to organize democratic groupings in Hungary, since it is our opinion that all organizing which rallies the enemies of fascism and is ready to fight dictatorial power, for democratic demands and against an imperialist war serves the interests of the proletariat." The Central Committee also frankly stated that "... we have committed many mistakes which hampered the development of joint action with social democratic workers and party organizations."

The aim of creating a democratic Hungary therefore entailed a re-examination of the Party's policy of alliance as well. Accordingly, methods and special political forms were developed which made it possible to involve in a united movement sections of the population and movements which had previously been indifferent, or had gone their own way. Representatives of non-communist currents also began to understand the need for this political rapprochement. This process was advanced by the fact that the KMP broke with its earlier political attitude which had made it difficult to take advantage of favourable opportunities.³¹

The Party's theoreticians, Pál Hajdu, Béla Lándor, György Lukács, Sándor Poll and chiefly József Révai, paid increasing attention to the lessons of the Hungarian past in the knowledge that "the Hungarian proletariat in its struggle for democracy can learn much from its own great revolutionary past, since it was the most consistent fighter for the bourgeois democratic revolution".³² While they searched the past for the roots of their current struggle, they developed a militant class-analytic view of the Hungarian past, enriching it with new insights.

Criticism of the socialist perspective which neglected the national question, as well as the dissociation from Hungarian nationalism, led to the development of the class-struggle concept of history which clarified the basic principles of an approach to national history which is still valid today – conforming to the requirements and methods of the socialist world outlook. Amongst these, one of the most important was the historical examination of the prevalent close relationship between social progress and the national question. József Révai in an article criticising Ervin Szabó's – the outstanding Marxist theoretician at the turn of the century – understanding of 1848 showed that the fact that the liberal nobility was the leading class of 1848 does not mean that what occurred in 1848 was not a bourgeois revolution, but, at the most, that "the revolution could not develop into

a democratic bourgeois revolution".³³ The national character of 1848 was not simply a continuation of the former feudal grievance policy, but a question closely related to social development in the period of the bourgeois transformation. Révai argued that since the internal class forces and the international situation did not allow or only partially allowed the bourgeois revolution in Hungary to solve its own problems in the nineteenth century, this had to be espoused by the Hungarian proletariat fighting for a socialist revolution and relying on the international forces of progress.

Therefore, on the one hand, the forces of the Hungarian revolutionary working-class movement understood from the analysis of Hungarian history that the proletariat fighting for socialism had to promote the settlement of the still unsolved questions of the bourgeois revolution and that it needed the support of those forces concerned; on the other hand, the peasantry began to recognise that they could not expect those in power to improve their situation and that they had to act on their own behalf.

The Hungarian communists helped to give concrete form to this desire for action and to turn it into a historically effective force. It was at their initiative that the March Front was established in March 1937, which incorporated in its programme the democratic aspirations of the peasantry and the professionals. The Hungarian communists, József Révai and Sándor Poll, regarded the March Front as the most important intellectual current of the post-war years, a movement that had the "deepest social and historical roots", seeing within it the possibility of a broad anti-fascist movement. They felt that it had the capacity to rally the healthy forces of the country around the alliance of the peasantry and the working class on the basis of such an anti-fascist programme which would not only aim for an internal transformation but also which would be capable of winning the neighbouring peoples' confidence.

György Bölöni, the progressive Hungarian writer, regarded the writers in the March Front as the heirs to Ady. Bölöni wrote: "History has turned back twenty years and after two decades the truths of the maligned Ady painfully and hauntingly ring out with greater timeliness than ever. And even if Ady's name is not on the lips of men, his spirit has now descended on Hungarian life, creatively and profoundly, and is becoming its motivating force. The more unbridgeable the chasm between the ruling order and the rising intellectual forces becomes, the wider and more conscious not only the point of view but the struggle itself, the more effective and timely Ady becomes."³⁴

In Béla Lándor's view the March Front had become a very important element of the progressive forces of the world. "The young writers of the March Front, following in the footsteps of the greatest Hungarian classic (Petőfi), fight with a courage and devotion worthy of respect to ensure that the ideas reflected in their books should penetrate to the masses, so that their literary activity should be the

³⁰ PI Library MM/21/288. Published in: *Dokumentumok a magyar forradalmi munkásmozgalom történetéből 1935–1945* (Documents of the History of the Hungarian Revolutionary Working-Class Movement 1935–1945), pp. 35–53, compiled by István Pintér and László Svéd, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1964.

³¹ See details in István Pintér's study in this volume.

³² Poll, S.: "A fasizmus elleni harc Magyarországon" (The Struggle against Fascism in Hungary), *Sarló és Kalapács*, August – September 1937, p. 237.

³³ Révai, J.: "Szabó Ervin és a 48-as forradalom" (Ervin Szabó and the Revolution of 48), *Sarló és Kalapács*, April 1, 1936, vol. VIII, Nos. 6–7, pp. 13–14. Also in Révai, J.: *Válogatott történelmi írások* (Selected Historical Writings), vol. I, p. 116, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1966.

³⁴ Bölöni, Gy.: "Ady Számadás 1938-ban" (Ady Report in 1938), *Új Hang*, January 1938, p. 64.

ground work for a great Hungarian undertaking which shall prepare the 'Hungarian change of fortunes'.³⁵

György Bálint, on the other hand, felt that the road they covered "increasingly deviated from the hitherto singly obligatory right-wing road and approaching the great objective of the Hungarian working masses is struggling against all those currents which wish to domesticate fascism, of one form or another, in Hungary."³⁶

Attila József, the greatest Hungarian proletarian poet, had more reservations, but basically he, too, saw the March Front as comrades-in-arms. "Szép Szó"³⁷ warmly welcomed the March Front, because it appeared before the public with resolute democratic demands. "... I, who in social questions take the logic of scientific socialism as my authority, can at most be only a comrade-in-arms of the new populists and even that only so long as they deserve sympathy for their democratic and social demands, even if they are not socialist demands. I very much regret that because of the reluctance of the new populists we cannot in the future act uniformly on the model of the French popular front³⁸ even though our demands are similar on many practical points."

In accordance with this basic position they judged the theoretical shortcomings of the March Front with "sympathy", "understanding" and "appreciation", to quote Bálint's above-mentioned article. There were two questions in particular in which Hungarian Marxists tried to help the March Front to reach ideological clarification. They proposed, firstly, that the March Front should advance a step and become a political movement, and secondly, they criticized its foreign policy. Since a large part of the March Front members still supported the "small country - large country" idea, the communists urged them to work out a foreign policy which would orient towards the camp of international progress. Polemizing with them, they wrote: "The collaboration of the Danubian peoples can no doubt be realized. Democratic forces here in Hungary, as in the neighbouring countries, are on the move. The example of Spain shows that only the destruction of fascism can save humanity from the threatening spectre of another 1914. And this is, at the same time, the only true solution for the Danubian problem."³⁹

These criticisms also played a role in the publication of *Híd*⁴⁰ in November 1937, which set itself the task of linking up parties and bringing peoples closer to each other and reconciling them. "The imperialist and nationalist system and rearmament policy carried to the extreme make present day Germany a uniform

³⁵ Lándor, B.: "Magyarország felfedezése. 'A magyar elmélkedés' megindítása" (The Discovery of Hungary. "Hungarian Contemplation" Begins), *Új Hang*, January 1938, p. 58.

³⁶ Bálint, Gy.: "Baloldali szocializmus vagy szektademokrácia" (Left-Wing Socialism or Sectarian Democracy), *Gondolat*, May-June 1937, pp. 137-139.

³⁷ A review of criticism and literature published between 1936-1939, at first edited by Pál Ignotus and Attila József. It fought against fascism, chauvinism and nationalism. Critical of the nationalism of some populist writers, it summarily condemned the movement as a whole.

³⁸ "Van-e szociológiai érdekeltége az új népies iránynak? Beszélgetés József Attilával" (Is the New Populist Trend of any Sociological Interest? A Discussion with Attila József), *Magyar Nap*, July 15, 1937.

³⁹ "Hozzászólás a dunai kérdéshez (Budapesti levél)" (A Contribution to the Danubian Question [Letter from Budapest]), *Új Hang*, January 1938, p. 118.

⁴⁰ The organ of the March Front, edited by Imre Kovács. It appeared between November 1937 and May 1938.

threat to the whole of Eastern and Central Europe" wrote Kálmán Potoczky, on the staff of the paper, in the December 1937 issue, which was later confiscated by the public prosecutor. He pointed to the rapid organization of populist forces as the realistic prerequisite of defence and for collaboration within and beyond the borders of the country. "A solution of the problem of the German minorities and the danger of German imperialism will no doubt bring the nations of Eastern and Central Europe closer to each other. These nations will have to understand that the imperialist policy of certain countries and interests cannot set them against one another and that as long as they serve these interests they are no more than pawns of the western powers to be moved around in accordance with the requirements of imperialist interests. The peoples of Eastern and Central Europe will grow out of this political embryonic state and will find the way to coexistence."⁴¹

It was not of negligible importance that the press of the March Front did much to popularize Soviet reality and Soviet literature, defending these against ever renewed nationalist attacks. Russian literature, Péter Veres wrote, "is the expression of the Russian people, of the Russian soul, of the Russian historical will". Gyula Illyés sought to give an insight into this with his anthology titled *Mai Orosz Dekameron* (A Contemporary Russian Decameron)⁴² as well as in articles that gave an objective account of Soviet literature.

As these positive intellectual tendencies grew stronger, the March Front began to be more active in politics. At a meeting in Makó, held on October 3, 1937 it proposed a coalition of the MSZDP, the Smallholders' Party (KGP), the Kossuth Party and other oppositional and left-wing groups.⁴³ A proclamation was accepted which unambiguously defined the intellectual starting point of such a coalition. The Makó Proclamation already clearly declared its position on the worker-peasant alliance and fraternal cooperation between the peoples of the Danubian Basin. The proclamation was signed, on October 3, 1937 by Ferenc Erdei, Géza Féja, Gyula Illyés, Imre Kovács and Péter Veres. It declared: "We hereby proclaim the need for the collaboration of the peoples of the Danubian Basin. The small peoples of the Danubian Basin have common political and economic interests. Because they have been living together for a long time the roots of their folk culture is also common. Such collaboration naturally can be realized only if the popular forces of all the states of the Danubian Basin come to power."⁴⁴

It was in this spirit that the March Front proposed a meeting of the representatives of democratic currents to discuss the collaboration between workers, peasants and professionals and to make a start towards its realization. A preliminary conference to prepare such a gathering was held in Budapest on January 21, 1938,

⁴¹ Potoczky, K.: "Közép-Európa problémája" (The Problem of Central Europe), *Híd*, December 1937.

⁴² *Nyugat* published the *Mai Orosz Dekameron*, A Soviet literary anthology, in 1936. Gyula Illyés wrote the introduction. The volume contained stories and the biographies and pictures of the following authors: Isaak Babel, Maxim Gorky, L.P. Grossman, Ilf-Petrov, V. Gronov, J. K. Olesha, K. G. Paustovsky, Boris Pilnyak, N. S. Tyihonov and Mikhail Zoshchenko.

⁴³ For details see István Pintér's study in this volume.

⁴⁴ *Magyar Út*, October 7, 1937

attended by the March Front, the Social Democratic Young Workers, the Miklós Bartha Society, the College of Szeged Youth, the representatives of the various organizations of young professionals, MEFHOSZ, and church youth societies, the leaders of the Agricultural Labourers' Association of Hungary, the representatives of the publications *Szép Szó*, *Vigilia*,⁴⁵ *Századunk*,⁴⁶ *Korunk Szava*,⁴⁷ and *Az Ország Útja*,⁴⁸ and clergymen of various Christian denominations.

The detectives, who were present, declared the preparatory conference dissolved, but while they went to fetch the police, those present decided to convene a three day literary meeting for March 15, 1938, the 90th anniversary of the 1848 Revolution at which they would discuss the land question, problems of trade and industry and cultural policy. Intellectual currents that had until then been attacking one another felt that joint action was needed. Therefore, they wanted to work out a programme which would make it possible to act together in the interest of parliamentary democracy and rapid social progress.

It looked as if this initiative would also pave the way for the worker-peasant alliance and for collaboration with those bourgeois democrats who were consistent in their solidarity with national and international democratic movements. As József Révai wrote, it seemed that from all sides they were beginning to understand that "Budapest is the city of March 15, of the socialist working-class movement, of Sándor Petőfi and of Endre Ady. The question in connection with these two giants of the Hungarian spirit, as to whether they are populist or humanist, is nonsensical. István Tömörkény and Sándor Bródy only express the extremes of the Hungarian spirit, the concord and greatness of this spirit is embodied in Sándor Petőfi and Endre Ady."⁴⁹ This is how the March Front, with the ideological assistance of the communists became an initiator of and a factor in the development of a national united front which attempted to connect the longing for peasant emancipation with a longing for the emancipation of mankind.

The formation and activity of the March Front aroused considerable interest among Hungarians in Czechoslovakia as well. "March 15, 1937 marks a turn in history", the antifascist *Magyar Nap* wrote, when it introduced the rural sociologist Imre Kovács to its readers.

Were there any similar endeavours there? To what extent had the situation of the Hungarians in Slovakia facilitated the united front policy of the communist party? As a result of the differentiation in the ranks of the Hungarians and in order to halt the leftward shift, under the pressure of mass sentiment and to quiet

⁴⁵ A Catholic literary and scientific periodical first published in 1935 which still appears.

⁴⁶ A bourgeois-radical social science periodical started in 1926. It sharply attacked the nationalist, right-wing and counter-revolutionary policy of the Horthy regime. It was banned by the Government in 1939.

⁴⁷ A progressive Catholic social review, started in 1931 by young Catholic writers and journalists. It ceased publication in 1939.

⁴⁸ A social-science and political, bourgeois periodical first published in 1937 which in the course of time became more definitely anti-fascist. After 1940 the staff included communist writers and journalists.

⁴⁹ "Népíesek és humanisták" (Populists and Humanists), *Magyar Nap*, March 10, 1938.

disgruntled supporters, the Hungarian bourgeois parties, the Christian Socialist Party and the Hungarian National Party, decided to unite in March 1936.⁵⁰

The united party tried, by seeming to espouse social issues, to ensure a monopoly position for itself among the Hungarians.

The democratic Hungarian forces in Czechoslovakia did not question the idea and urgency of unity either. "There is no need to prove that there are certain points where the interests of every minority Hungarian meet. Fascist reaction, which threatens the minorities in the first place, the economic discrimination which renders the working sections of the minority powerless, and the system of inferiority which sooner or later retards the flowering of Hungarian culture are such danger signals which clearly determine the direction of Hungarian policy."⁵¹ They also pointed out that the real representatives of the Hungarian masses were not invited to the merger negotiations of the two Hungarian parties, from which it followed that the direction and aim of the "new" party would remain unchanged.

While the bourgeois parties counted on the vague promises of the succeeding governments in Budapest, the democratic currents in Hungary searched for the ways and means of a united front which would encompass wide sections of the Hungarian population and be based on the democratic forces of the majority peoples. Relying on the Czechoslovakian Communist Party's struggle for national minority rights, the Hungarian cultural organizations proposed that a congress be held to create unity by building up contacts between Hungarians and Czechoslovaks and by defending cultural rights. The writer Lajos Barta welcomed the congress called for April 18 and 19, 1936 (Spring Parliament) with sympathy and expectation, since it "aspires to unite the Hungarian intelligentsia against fascism and is working to create a popular front of intellectuals".

The atmosphere at the Spring Parliament was favourable and confident. Cultural associations of differing world outlooks endeavoured to unite their forces in creative, progressive work. When Todor Schubert, the Director of the Leva Club, who made the first report to Parliament, stated that cooperation of the cultural forces would have to be created from below, by-passing central cultural organizations, he was opposed by Lujza Eszterházy, the leader of the Christian Socialist Girls' Organizations and by the representatives of the workers.

A similar united stand was taken in opposition to the address of István Farkas, the publisher of the *Egyenes Úton* who, when arguing against the "pseudo-left" and the emigrés, tried to break up the camp of those striving for unity by smuggling in racist ideas. Representatives of Christian associations supported the followers of the socialist world outlook on this point, and the latter obtained the sympathy of the former by supporting the demand for a Hungarian cultural community.

This readiness to cooperate also played a role in formulating that resolution of the Spring Parliament expressing the agreement which the representatives of the

⁵⁰ The policies of the Christian Socialist Party, led by Géza Szűllő, and the Hungarian National Party, founded in 1925 and led by József Szent-Iványi, was Hungarian nationalist, anti-republican and anti-Marxist. The United Hungarian Party, founded on June 21, 1936 by the unification of the two parties was led by the irredentist Count János Esterházy. In 1938 the United Hungarian Party formed an alliance with the separatist Slovak People's Party, and the German Heineleins.

⁵¹ Ács, P.: "A magyar népi egység parancsa" (The Requirements of Hungarian National Unity). *Magyar Nap*, March 14, 1936.

Hungarian proletariat and middle class had reached in defense of Hungarian culture. The resolution declared that, in the interest of integrated cultural work and actions to defend common interests, the cultural organizations would meet from time to time under the name "Spring Parliament". The Spring Parliament urged the workers in the cultural field, regardless of ideology, to deal objectively with Hungarian cultural questions on a European level. Accordingly, "the Parliament, recognising the interdependence of the peoples of the Danubian basin, considers it expedient to extend contacts in the interest of bringing Slav and Hungarian cultures closer together". It approved the establishment of good relations with the independent Czech cultural organizations so as to ensure their support for legitimate Hungarian cultural demands. The associations which had taken part in the Spring Parliament organized local coalitions of cultural organizations, doing their utmost to satisfy the cultural requirement of the Hungarian workers and peasants.⁵² In view of what the Spring Parliament had achieved, Lajos Barta was justified in writing "An honest man comes away from the Spring Parliament with a sense of history... Because over and over again man becomes aware that the living nations finally create a great equalization within themselves which ascends toward progress."⁵³

There was a noticeable progressive shift amongst Hungarians in Rumania as well. One of the stimulating factors was the fight for minority rights in which MADOSZ engaged, relying on and in alliance with Rumanian democratic forces. In the spirit of this political conception, Hillel Kohn and Augustin Almasan, on behalf of the Rumanian Communist Party, arranged negotiations between the Secretary of MADOSZ, László Bányai, and Dr. Petru Groza, the leader of the Ploughmen's Front. On September 24, 1935 they concluded an agreement of cooperation between the two organizations which was made known to a meeting of Rumanian and Hungarian peasants and workers. "When we concluded the agreement with the Alliance of Hungarian Workers", Dr. Petru Groza said, "there were some who were afraid of a joint Peoples' Assembly. What will happen, a lawyer friend asked me, when the Hungarian representatives meet... the descendants of Horia, Closca and Avram Iancu's fighters for whom Hungarian domination is still a hated memory! The meeting began, and there among... them were the Hungarians - peasants, workers, and artisans. When an ordinary Hungarian peasant began to speak there was complete silence. My frightened lawyer friend asked me to somehow stop the Hungarian speaker because there was sure to be trouble. The Hungarian speaker must have become aware of the tense silence because he stopped speaking and asked: "My Rumanian brothers, can you understand what I am saying? Should we get an interpreter?" And do you know what happened? The Motz replied loudly: "Go on in Hungarian! We can understand you! We'll translate for those who can't." There you are, that's the people for you. I had prepared for Bács, the village where we held the meeting, with the thought that something new would be born there. But it turned out that an alliance between the Hungarian and the Rumanian peoples was nothing new, that

⁵² *Magyar Nap*, April 19, 21, and 22, 1936.

⁵³ "A Tavaszí Parlament után" (After the Spring Parliament), *Magyar Nap*, April 23, 1936.

spirit had been alive in the masses for a long time, there is no national hatred these days up in the mountains."⁵⁴

Relying on this alliance, the Hungarian communists in Rumania were able to take initial steps, with some hope of success, to create the unity of all Hungarian popular and democratic currents. After long and complicated but successful preparatory work the Tirgu Mures (Marosvásárhely) Meeting was held in October 1937 under the chairmanship of the famous Transylvanian writer Áron Tamási. This meeting was the political parliament of the progressive Hungarian currents in Rumania, conceived in recognition of the desire for a democratic way of life and the need to find a way to establish contact with the Rumanian people.

The one hundred and eighty-seven participants of the meeting agreed that the working classes and not the leadership of the Hungarian Party must have the decisive say in the life of Hungarians in Rumania. They also opted for cooperation with the Rumanian people. The "Creed" accepted at the end of the meeting stressed that "the Hungarians of Rumania, and their assembled youth, proclaim the need for fraternal coexistence and reconciliation with the Rumanian people, and wish to emphasize their sincere readiness and honest intentions toward this end..."⁵⁵

Gábor Gaál, the editor of the legal Marxist periodical *Korunk* published in Cluj, called the Tirgu Mures Meeting a formation similar to the western united or popular front. According to *Új Hang* the periodical of Hungarian communists, which appeared in Moscow, "this meeting denoted a turning point in the eighteen year old history of the Hungarian minority in Rumania. The militants of the Tirgu Mures Meeting, the representatives of every section of the Hungarian people in Transylvania, led by progressive democratic-minded writers, took a stand on the question of national minorities and also on a number of burning problems concerning the fraternal coexistence of all the Danubian peoples. This non-party meeting of the youth, called for a fight for the right to use their mother tongue, for intellectual freedom and economic activity and against all manifestations of national oppression. The role and importance of the Tirgu Mures Meeting is however best indicated by the fact that the cream of the Hungarian professionals of Transylvania, who were present, for the first time voiced the wish to cooperate with the working class and with Rumanian democratic forces."⁵⁶

These efforts to create a united front also aroused the interest of Hungarians in Yugoslavia. The periodical *Híd* published in Subotice reported the development of these movements with sympathetic attention and published the writings of their leaders. The May 1938 issue, for example, published "Egyenes magyar beszéd" (Hungarian Straight Talk) and "Ezeréves magyar riadalom" (One-thousand Years of Hungarian Panic) by Edgar Balogh. Hungarian communists and intellectuals around the *Híd* tried to clear the way for the founding of similar popular groupings oriented towards the democratic forces of the Yugoslav people. They

⁵⁴ Quoted by Balogh, E.: *Egyenes beszéd* (Straight Talk), pp. 114-115, Irodalmi és Művészeti Kiadó, Bucharest, 1957.

⁵⁵ Csátári, D.: *A Vásárhelyi Találkozó* (The Tirgu Mures [Marosvásárhely] Meeting), p. 92, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1967.

⁵⁶ "A Vásárhelyi Találkozó" (The Tirgu Mures [Marosvásárhely] Meeting), *Új Hang*, p. 116, January 1938.

knew that there were democratic requirements for the ensurance of national minority rights and that is why they supported the Yugoslav political forces who fought for this. Even non-communist Hungarian professionals were becoming aware that only the joint struggle of their own masses with those of the majority people, and not a Horthy type of territorial revisionism, would secure equal rights for the national minorities. This was expressed by *Kalangya*,⁵⁷ a periodical, which, owing to its democratic and anti-chauvinist ideas, soon found itself in conflict with Horthy's policy on nationalities and their rights, and which was moving closer to the consistent anti-fascist currents amongst Hungarians in Yugoslavia.

Every step, which indicated that aspirations aimed at ensuring equal rights to nationalities were getting stronger amongst the people in the majority, had a favourable effect on the realignment process toward an integrated political stand. How intensive the process in this field was can be indicated by mentioning just one fact. In Subotica, in 1937, at the municipal general meeting, the town leader suggested that the Lajos Kossuth fund, established before 1918 to provide financial assistance to talented Hungarian students, be incorporated in the general fund for education. This proposal was rejected by Radivoy Lungulob, the Headmaster. "It would not be proper in the least," he said, "for the Lajos Kossuth fund to be incorporated in the general education fund. The Lajos Kossuth fund may still be used in the spirit of Kossuth. Kossuth was not merely a Hungarian, he was primarily a man who fought to bring the peoples together. Kossuth's spirit is in conflict neither with the integrity of our state nor with our national culture. On the contrary, proceeding in Kossuth's spirit, it is possible to ensure Yugoslav-Hungarian cultural cooperation. I protest against increasing the general fund for education in this manner, particularly since this would be contrary to our national ideas... I propose that the Lajos Kossuth fund should continue under that name and that it be used to support cultural cooperation between Serbians and Hungarians, that is, between the Yugoslav and the Hungarian nations. Let us educate one or more Hungarian children who will then become the militant pioneers of Hungarian-Yugoslav cooperation."⁵⁸

Innumerable examples could be mentioned but the above suffices to show that the conditions for the successes of the popular front policy of the interdependent peoples were maturing amongst large sections of the population.

These unity movements temporarily halted the nationalist ideas that were aimed at furthering Hitlerist penetration. They had also begun to develop the principles and conditions which were essential for the ordering of the relationships between the peoples of Eastern Europe, but they were unable to grow into the kind of force that could fundamentally influence the course of events. This was due to the change in the international and domestic social circumstances which was a fertile soil for the policies of the communist parties. The earlier balance of power in Eastern Europe fell apart in 1938 and nationalist tendencies were being activated and strengthened. With the occupation of Austria a new process of

⁵⁷ A literary periodical which appeared between 1932 and 1944. The well-known Yugoslav Hungarian writer and literary organizer, Kornél Szenteleky, edited it until his death in 1933 when Károly Szirmay took over.

⁵⁸ "Újabb adatok a jugoszláv-magyar közeledéshez" (New Data concerning Yugoslav-Hungarian Rapprochement), *Magyar Kisebbség*, p. 354, July 1, 1937.

stratification began in East European political power relations which led to the entanglement of the relationship of the peoples living there. After the first tremors of the new world catastrophe, the popular fronts which had been in the process of formation drifted towards dissolution in Rumania, Czechoslovakia and Hungary alike. Direct interference in the internal affairs of these states by Germany gave considerable encouragement to the forces of the extreme right which openly strove for power and were the harbingers of dependence on Nazi Germany. The advance of German fascism also poisoned the relationship between the peoples of various nationality living side by side. On the one hand the strengthening of the extreme right and fascist efforts led to increased oppression of the national minorities, and, on the other hand, the policy of "peaceful territorial revision", which relied on the promises of fascist Germany, exerted its own destructive influence. The latter increased its influence among the middle sectors of the Hungarian national minorities, who were suffering ever growing oppression at a time when the democratic Hungarian and the majority people's forces had barely emerged. The apparently realistic possibility of a peaceful revision of frontiers in this way created the conditions for the consideration of a possible separation of national and social demands, and strengthened the element of distrust in Hungarian domestic affairs as well.

Following the *Anschluss*, the communist parties of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Rumania, that had established direct liaison, reconciled their points of view⁵⁹ and drew the attention of the East European peoples to their common danger. They urged the formation of such a united front of the states concerned which could rely on the might of the democratic great powers which stood for collective security, and principally on the Soviet Union.

The Social Democratic Party of Hungary (MSZDP) and the trade unions were the most important base for organizing the anti-war struggle in Hungary. The head of the investigation department of the police reported on June 8, 1938: "According to confidential information, communist party members within the social democratic party and the trade unions have recently started to agitate heavily against territorial revision and war. They tell people that the class-conscious workers of Hungary must not use arms against countries... where power is in the hands of the working class... Antal Apró, a house-painter, declared in the Building Trades Workers' Union (MEMOSZ) that the Hungarian proletariat will know its duty should war break out and it will not fight against its Slovak or other proletarian brothers. Hungarian working people cannot support the imperialist aspirations of Hungarian fascists, they need neither Northern Hungary nor Transylvania, what they want is a democratic Hungary, and if necessary, they will mobilize all the working people of Hungary to that end."⁶⁰

The class-conscious workers of the country had in fact understood that both their socialist ideology and their social position obliged them to take part in the anti-German fight for independence in conformity with the interests of universal progress. While defending the independence of the country at home, they also protected the interests of general progress and the best of their comrades, following the unwritten law of proletarian solidarity, were at the side of the Spanish

⁵⁹ PI Archives, fond 651, 2/1938-2-4242.

⁶⁰ PI Archives, fond 651, 2/1938-1-9552.

people with guns in hand but were at the same time also fighting for the independence of Hungary.

Freedom for Hungary and for the world were voiced together in the message addressed to the "March Front" in July 1938 by the Hungarian internationalists fighting in Spain. "We, the Hungarian volunteers fighting in Spain, who have irrevocably committed ourselves to the struggle of the peoples of the world for world democracy, of the Hungarian people for Hungarian democracy, we greet the "March Front". Yes, exactly here, in a foreign land, amidst the vile and murderous intervention of German and Italian fascism, we have really learnt just how precious human liberty is. The idea of human freedom led us here to help the heroic Spanish people, whose democratic popular front is a solid dam against the filthy flood of fascism which in the first place wishes to engulf such smaller nations as Spain, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Our fight here, in which workers and writers all take part is linked to the fate of the independence of our country, too... We here are ready, as the loyal sons of our country, to offer support to every democratic nation and every popular movement that puts the slogans of peoples' freedom and national independence on its standards! We ask only one thing of the March Front: that it rise to the occasion not only with words, but with deeds as well. That it ally itself with all the democratic forces in Hungary and with the Hungarian working class. That it fight against the Hungarian reactionaries who serve the Germans and against every form of intervention which, in the interests of fascism, seeks to drive democratic Bohemia or Spain or Hungary into fascist servitude."⁶¹

By that time the first indication of an unfavourable change had appeared in the ranks of the "March Front", which later led to very critical political differentiations. Because the confusion appeared in the intellectual field – in views on the relationship between nation and progress, national and universal, Hungarian and world freedom – the communists sought to answer the question as to whether national interests and social progress are of necessity opposed to each other by analyzing Hungarian history. This line of thought dominates two studies of József Révai, "Magyar szabadság – világ szabadság" (Hungarian freedom – World Freedom), and "Kölcsey helye a magyar irodalomban" (The Place of Kölcsey in Hungarian Literature), which deals with the great nineteenth century Hungarian poet Ferenc Kölcsey, and from which we wish to present a few thoughts.

As against Gergely Berzeviczy, the landowner, and János Batsányi, the poet, who, while declaring themselves in favour of progress, renounced national demands, or like the poets Sándor Kisfaludy and Dániel Berzsenyi, who defended the rights of the Estates in the name of national sentiment, Révai recalls Kölcsey, who had experienced and understood the universal problems of the Hungarians of his day. The confrontation of homeland and progress emanated from the objective fact that in Hungary, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the leading national class was the bourgeoisified middle nobility which could lead the country onto the path of bourgeois progress only after great internal struggles, inhibitions

⁶¹ "A magyar milicisták válasza a Márciusi Front felhívására" (Hungarian Militiamen's Answer to the Call of the "March Front"), *Szabad Szó*, (Paris), July 2, 1938. In: *Dokumentumok a magyar forradalmi munkásmozgalom történetéhez 1935–1945* (Documents of the History of the Hungarian Revolutionary Working-Class Movement 1935–1945), p. 145.

and reactionary relapses by keeping one leg on the feudal ground against which it had to fight.

Kölcsey's concept about the relation between nation and progress was free of conflict and in all aspects pointed the way ahead. The homeland could only be assured, in his view, if the contemporary demands of progress were satisfied, if the serfs were liberated and if civil liberties were obtained. Therefore, prompted by his love of his country, he fought for social progress in the interest of the rebirth of the nation. The organic interconnection between homeland and progress was the basis, in Kölcsey's world outlook, which led him to take the first steps towards a proper interpretation of the complete unity of national and world freedom. It follows from Kölcsey's example, Révai wrote, that "the patriotism of one people cannot be in contradiction with that of another: those who love their own country and people, understand and love every country and people, the world over. In other words, those who know how to fight for the happiness of their own people, for its freedom and independence, regard the liberty and independence of another nation as their own cause".⁶²

Hungarian communists approached the problem of Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries in the light of such a universal view. Against Hitler's attempts to force Czechoslovakia to her knees, they supported the struggle of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. The memorandum by the Czech Party, submitted to Prime Minister Milan Hodza, on April 15, 1938 and signed by K. Gottwald, J. Fucik, A. Borkanyuk, V. Siroky and A. Zápotoczy, demanded that full nationality rights be guaranteed. It stated: "Hungarians play a significant role in defending the Republic. Therefore it is one of the most urgent political tasks to meet their and the other minorities' legitimate national demands." In order to strengthen the democratic rights of the Hungarians and to improve their relations with other nations, they demanded the elaboration of such a law on minority rights which would recognize and ensure the national equality of Hungarians before the law. Meanwhile – the communist Senators and deputies argued – the social circumstances of the Hungarians must urgently be improved, the full force of the law must be applied against all who violate the rights of minorities, and their most burning grievances must be redressed. "That is why we demand that the Hungarians' right for citizenship be recognized, that democratic changes be made in the language law, that inscriptions be in the Hungarian language, that the Hungarians' demands concerning schools be satisfied, that a Hungarian School Council be established in Slovakia and that the employment of Hungarians be allowed."⁶³

The Hungarian masses in Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, spoke out against Hungarian territorial revisionism. They fought for a solution together with the fraternal peoples under the slogan: "In-defence of the Republic – for the independence of Hungary". This was the prevailing atmosphere at the mass rally of democratic Hungarians held at Beregszász on September 4, 1938 where János Varga and Bertalan Biró, the leaders of the democratic Hungarians, to the ac-

⁶² The article first appeared in *Új Hang* in November 1938 and then, in 1946, in Révai, J.: *Marxizmus és magyarság* (Marxism and Hungarianism), p. 38, Szikra, Budapest, 1946.

⁶³ "Nemzetiségi alaptörvényt kiegészíteni jogokkal" (To Extend the Nationality Law with Rights), *Magyar Nap*, April 17, 1938.

claim of the assembled 2,500 people spoke of consolidating the common militant front of the peoples living together and in furtherance of this urged equal rights for Hungarians. At the mass rally held at Tarnóc the same day, the communist Senator, Mikulíček and Ion Polican, a former supporter of the "Sarló" movement, demanded equal national minority rights in the name of the majority people. István Major, a communist deputy, and Gyula Lőrinczy said that the Hungarians of Slovakia must not allow themselves to become Hitler's jackals for the sake of Hungary's future either, since the only obstacle to the subjugation of Hungary, Rumania and Yugoslavia by the aggressor was that Czechoslovakia defied him. The Proclamation of the Alliance of Hungarian Youth which was accepted at this mass rally declared that "those who take up arms for the Czechoslovak Republic fight at the same time for the independence of Hungary, and for a better future for all Hungarians as well".⁶⁴

The voice of conscience, whether it spoke in Russian, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian or Rumanian, did so in vain; the common cause was defeated before the fight even started. "The masses sing the national anthem... they sing the Internationale", the *chargé d'affaires* of the Soviet Union recorded on September 22, 1938 the tragic moments in Prague. "Hope for help from the Soviet Union takes first place in the speeches, appeals for the defense of the country, the convening of parliament, the resignation of the government... Hitler and Chamberlain both arouse hatred... I receive delegations... I tell the delegates that the Soviet Union has high regard for the interests of the Czechoslovak Republic and working people - and for precisely that reason is ready to offer help against aggression. Such assistance has been made complicated by the French rejection, but the Soviet Union is searching for the ways, and will find them, should Czechoslovakia be attacked and forced to defend herself."⁶⁵

It is generally known that, despite the efforts of the Soviet Union, assistance was obstructed by the opposition of the Western Powers, and capitulation to Hitler by the Czechoslovakian Republic ensued.

Following the First Vienna Award, and then after the occupation of the Sub-Carpathian Ukraine in March 1939, territories were once again attached to Hungary the population of which was not only Hungarian but also contained large number of Slovaks and Ruthenians. The Hungarian ruling class, basking in the light of the successes of bloodless territorial revision sought to strengthen its domestic social position as well. They aimed to lessen social and political tensions by discriminating against national minorities, by confiscating their material goods and taking possession of cultural institutions or by implementing an aggressive and oppressive national minorities policy. The projection of social problems and class contradictions to the plane of national-nationality contradiction again fanned the flames of nationalism which had already been high enough. Gyula Szekfű, the leading historian of that time wrote: "The Almighty put us to the test when some of the territories inhabited by minorities were returned. We then had the opportunity to demonstrate to the world that we could satisfactorily settle all that

to which we had objected in a quarter of a century's territorial revisionist propaganda; to show the world how the national minorities have to be treated so that they, having achieved their legitimate objectives, will be satisfied. We failed miserably to meet the test by doing exactly the opposite of what would have been right and proper."⁶⁶

In this situation it was not easy to pick out the real interests of the peoples living here from the web of fascist power and nationalist policies and to present them to the public as part of a programme which would indicate the possibility of lessening and eliminating tensions in connection with the demands of universal progress, and the securing of equal rights for nations suffering a similar fate, making their approach to one another easier.

Only the KMP, being based on an internationalist ideology, was able to formulate such a programme in Hungary. Since this stand of the party is relatively unknown, I propose to quote at length from a document which shows that even in those difficult times Hungarian communists continued to support the unity of universal-national and nationality freedoms. "The communist party in the Sub-Carpathian Ukraine has to mobilize the broad masses against every endeavour of the Hungarian reactionaries to involve Hungary in some kind of anti-Soviet aggressive bloc. A fight must be carried on for peace and the preservation of neutrality, for good neighbourly relations with bordering states and particularly for friendly relations with the Soviet Union! The communist party mobilizes the broadest masses against every kind of national minority oppression and for the right of self-determination, including the right to secede. Propagating this slogan, the party has to explain to the masses in a popular way that this means winning the right for each nation to decide for itself where it wishes to belong, and how it wishes to arrange its social life. This means that the people of the Sub-Carpathian Ukraine have to fight jointly with the Hungarian proletariat for the removal of the Hungarian police, gendarmerie, army and other agents of force from the territory of the Sub-Carpathian Ukraine, for the rights of organization and association and for the freedom of the press, for a democratically elected National Assembly in the Sub-Carpathian Ukraine, for the filling of public offices by election etc. Besides, the solution of the national minority problem, as exemplified by the liberated peoples of the Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia, has to be popularized. A mighty struggle has to be waged against local bourgeois nationalism (the Bródy and Fencziks)⁶⁷ against every manifestation of national chauvinism, and for greater solidarity with the Hungarian working people. The proletariat has the leading role in the liberation movement of the national minorities." The statement, after setting down the areas of fight to defend the interests and the rights of the proletariat, the working people of the villages and the urban middle classes, strongly stressed: "Let us fight forced Magyarization, let us demand the use of the mother tongue in the schools and the dismissal of teachers who do not know Ukrainian or Russian from the Ukrainian and Russian schools, and for their replacement by Ukrainian and Russian school teachers. The official

⁶⁴ OL, BM. VII. res. 1938/2-12998.

⁶⁵ *Kelet-Európa 1900-1945. Újabb és legújabbkori egyetemes történeti szöveggyűjtemény* (Eastern Europe 1900-1945. A Collection of Documents relating to Modern and Contemporary Universal History), vol. 5/1, p. 432, edited by István Dolmányos, Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest, 1970.

⁶⁶ Szekfű, Gy.: *Forradalom után* (After the Revolution), pp. 68-69, Cserépfalvi Kiadó, Budapest, 1947.

⁶⁷ The Sub-Carpathian Ukraine Party that was supported by the Hungarian government.

right to use the Ukrainian language in all state and public offices has to be insisted on. The right to cultural contacts with the Soviet Union has to be demanded as well as the delivery of Ukrainian and Russian literature and the right to publish Russian and Ukrainian literature and journals, to have a Russian and Ukrainian theatre, cinema, etc."

The Party thought it proper and necessary to use every legal means in the fight for these demands. For example, it supported the attempt to form an autonomous Ruthenian wing of the Smallholders' Party which could defend "the political, economic and cultural rights of the Ruthenian peasantry". At the same time "steps have to be taken to establish local organizations of the MSzDP. Representatives have to negotiate with the leadership of the MSzDP regarding the formation of a Ruthenian section, with the condition that it have autonomous rights and an autonomous leadership; that officials be local people with the right to name their own candidates in elections." Besides building up trade unions, and utilizing the reading circles, the "Hangya"⁶⁸, and the "Levente" organization⁶⁹, the party, mindful of disillusionment in the ranks of the Bródy party, considered it important also "that the communist party should embrace these sections of the population and lead them in the fight against Bródy and against Hungarian reaction, for the rights of the people in the Sub-Carpathian Ukraine and toward a pro-Soviet Union orientation."⁷⁰

Not only the party organizations of the Sub-Carpathian Ukraine, but also those of Kosice (Kassa), Érsekújvár, Losonc, Fülek and Rimaszombat fought for these consistent objectives. Strengthened by internationalist militants like Zoltán Schönherz, whom the Horthy fascists murdered in 1942, and Sándor Szekeres and Dávid Nemes, whom the Czechoslovak Communist Party had trained,⁷¹ and by availing themselves of the opportunities inherent in the trade unions, they organized the Hungarian, Slovak and Ruthenian working class in a common struggle against war, for the improvement of their conditions and for their rights. At the same time, in the interests of organizing the Hungarian, Slovak and Ukrainian peasantry, and breaking the political monopoly of the Hungarian Party, they tried to further the penetration of these areas by the movement of oppositionist writers and by the National Peasant Party, which was founded in the summer of 1939.

Since the strengthening nationalist wave further deepened the process of the negative differentiation of the opposing forces, the Hungarian communists emphasized that only with the help of a universal outlook and of the forces of progress could the Hungarians escape from this dead-end leading to national tragedy. "The working class which raises high the banner of internationalism is the driving force and backbone of national unity and the national community," József Révai wrote. "A working class that has been diverted from internationalism can only take part in it like a scattered flock, as a powerless and insignificant factor. The experience of the international community means more to the working class than

⁶⁸ The Hangya Cooperative was founded in 1898. It defended the interest of the owners of large estates and rich peasants and operated in accordance with the economic policy of the anti-people governments.

⁶⁹ The counter-revolutionary "Levente" organization was founded in 1921 for the fascist and military training of young men.

⁷⁰ PI Archives, fond 500, unit 2/604.

⁷¹ Nemes Dávid visszaemlékezései (The Memoires of Dávid Nemes), PI Archives, H-e-22.

participation in the national community, but if it wants at all to take part in national life consciously, militantly and in a proletarian way it has to acquire international class consciousness. The Hungarian working class cannot extend its hand to the Hungarian peasantry if it has not earlier embraced the Spanish, Russian and French working class. Those who wish the working class to be merely patriots stop the working class from being patriots at all."⁷²

On this principled basis the Hungarian communists condemned the Hungarian revisionist attack against Rumania in the autumn of 1939 and exposed the nationalist efforts to set the Hungarian people against the Rumanian people.

The Rumanian communists on the other hand, in keeping with the requirements of solidarity, intensified their fight against the policy of the Rumanian ruling classes which gave rise to grievances by the national minorities. The Peoples' Assembly at Cluj (Kolozsvár) on December 30 and 31, 1939 was an important stage in this struggle. Giving voice to the social and national grievances of the Hungarian masses, the Cluj People's Assembly, basing itself on the principles of the Tirgu Mures (Marosvásárhely) Assembly, proposed a new popular cooperation. "We wish to convince the sons of other nations living in this country", the resolution declared, "that our gathering serves the brotherhood of peoples and is not directed against anybody. We consider it important that, at future, widely based conferences, the delegates of our Transylvanian Rumanian, German, Jewish and Ukrainian brother workers, with whom we have been welded together in a common struggle, should also participate." That is why participants at the conference "undertake to build a Hungarian people's community based entirely on popular representation, bearing in mind the special class position of workers". They rejected every step aimed at creating a barrier between them and other nationalities in their class organizations and at their place of employment. "The Hungarian working class fights together with its comrades of differing nationalities against all attempts to denationalize it, and for the universal rights of the Hungarian people in Rumania. We want to fight against the spread of the war to our country and for the brotherhood and peace of all the nations arm in arm with our brother people here."⁷³

Meanwhile the Rumanian democratic forces nurtured the spirit of respect for the Hungarian people and fought for the rights of minorities. *Familia*, a periodical published in Oradea Mare (Nagyvárad) and *Erdélyi Helikon* published in Cluj (Kolozsvár) regularly informed its readers on events in Hungarian intellectual life. Al Olteanu, a critic, drawing the attention of the Rumanian readers to the work of populist writers in Hungary, wrote about the movement itself: "These young men make superhuman efforts to disperse the fog which has obscured the Hungarian vision in recent years. One cannot deny that they have opened new vistas for progressive thought in Hungary."⁷⁴ At a Petőfi-Eminescu-Ády festival arranged in Brasov (Brassó) a number of lecturers spoke about the sources of

⁷² Révai, J.: "Magyar szocializmus". Szocialista megjegyzések Féja Géza cikkéhez ("Hungarian Socialism." Socialist Observations on Géza Féja's Article), *Üzenet*, (Paris), July-August 1939, p. 188.

⁷³ The points relating to the working class in the resolution of the Transylvanian Hungarian Peoples' Assembly held in Cluj (Kolozsvár) on December 30 and 31, 1939.

⁷⁴ "Magyar ideológiai áramlatok" (Hungarian Ideological Currents), *Familia*, November-December 1939, p. 45, (published in Rumanian).

Hungarian – Rumanian intellectual contacts that had been lost sight of and the working-class audience enthusiastically acclaimed Rumanian – Hungarian cultural contacts. Nicolae Iorga, the leading Rumanian historian of the period, published an earlier study in Hungarian as well. He had this to say: "I think I am performing a useful service for humanity in general, and in particular for these two nations of which I love one because it is my own and respect the other for the historic mission it has fulfilled and for the good qualities which it has maintained right to this day, by pointing out how much futility there is in the historical causes of this hatred, for surely there are many motives which hold together the whole or one or another part or fragment of the two peoples to carry out historical or cultural activities and know the consequences which arise from this circumstance for the future life of a nation, whatever shape the state might take."⁷⁵

But just as the Hungarian Left, in spite of heroic efforts, was unable to neutralize the intellectual influence of revisionist policies, these efforts, which are deserving of the highest respect, could not stop the oppression of the national minorities. These were the circumstances which allowed Hitler to put to good use the divide-and-rule principle in Hungarian–Rumanian relations. By the summer of 1940 it had already assumed alarming aspects.

The most outstanding members of the working masses, who best of all expressed the deprivation of our peoples' rights, saw clearly that national liberation could be attained only by eliminating social oppression through a fight waged together with the Rumanian people. Consequently, they repeatedly argued in favour of a militant alliance of the Hungarian and the Rumanian peoples. There was no lack of protest. There were stormy rallies in all the major towns of Transylvania, but the will of the people had little weight on the scale of power. In vain did they quote the poem of peace by Ernő Salamon, the Transylvanian proletarian poet: "Who needs new lands? Why upset the borders? Hungarians and Rumanians will get along well here!", the division of Transylvania at the Second Vienna Award occurred nevertheless. With this the political struggles of the internationalist forces entered a new stage, bringing new and severe ordeals in its wake.

Few were aware that the "order" created by the Second Vienna Award was really a new source of disorder. The relationship of the peoples who lived there together and the problem of the minorities sank to the level of an instrument of blackmail employed by Hitler, increasing the degree of Hungary's and other countries' dependence on fascist Germany.

Under the circumstances of nationalist agitation and national oppression which weighed heavily on the Rumanian people and following the occupation of the South Country in April 1941⁷⁶ on the Serbs as well, Hungarian communists formulated their concepts to meet the requirements of universal progress, national independence and the demand for equal rights for all nationalities. The

⁷⁵ Iorga, N.: *A nemzetek közötti lévő gyűlölködés ellen. A románok és a magyarok* (Against Hatred between Nations. The Rumanians and the Hungarians), p. 6, Bucharest, 1940.

⁷⁶ On April 6, 1941, a few months after a treaty of "eternal friendship" was signed by Yugoslavia and Hungary on December 12, 1940, Germany and Hungary attacked Yugoslavia without declaring war. The Yugoslav forces surrendered on April 18, 1941.

programme approved by the Executive Committee of the Comintern in September 4, 1940, which expressed this relationship, determined the internationalist activity of Hungarian communists.

The resolution stated that the Second Vienna Award meant that the independence of Hungary was in jeopardy and urged the reestablishment of good relations between Hungary, Slovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia. For that reason the tasks of the struggle for equal rights for national minorities was also formulated: "The KMP must take up the fight for the self-determination of the oppressed national minorities in Hungary, of the Ukrainians, Rumanians and Slovaks, including their right to secede from the State. The masses have to be convinced that only through such a struggle can the solidarity of all working people be established in Hungary regardless of nationality. Only in this way can the common struggle of the Hungarian working class and the working classes of Rumania, Slovakia and Yugoslavia be organized against the ruling classes of their countries and against capitalism. Thus will the conditions be created for a just solution of the national question in the Danube basin on the basis of the right of self-determination and the common, free and peaceful agreement of all the nations concerned. The Party must prove to the Hungarian people that only a determined struggle for the self-determination of the oppressed Rumanians, Ukrainians and Slovaks in Hungary accords with Hungary's national interests."⁷⁷

It was not without cause that a representative complained at the December 2, 1940 sitting of the House of Representatives that "nowhere in the whole of Europe is there a working class which is as international as the Hungarian."⁷⁸

The class conscious Hungarian proletariat truly fought in the spirit of this principle for the economic and political demands of their national minority brothers, for the defence of trade unions, for land for the peasantry and for democratic rights.

True to the unwritten law of solidarity, the communists, chiefly in Northern Transylvania, helped Czechoslovak and Ukrainian refugees who were stuck there, and took up collections for the support of those comrades who had fought for Republican Spain and who were languishing under extraordinarily difficult circumstances in French internment camps.

Two major political events in the first half of 1941 proved the extent to which the idea of proletarian solidarity reflected the link between the interests of the Hungarian nation and those of the progressive forces of the world. When in March 1941 the Soviet Union returned the flags of the 1848/49 War of Independence to Hungary, the workers of Budapest demonstrated in favour of Hungarian – Soviet friendship all the way from the Eastern Railway Station to the statue of Arthur Görgey, where the military unit carrying the flags passed. Democratic newspapers which had kept the ideas of 1848 alive, expressed the feelings of the masses: "The flags now return"; *Népszava* stated in its March 23, 1941 issue, "They return and they must bring back the old March spirit as well. They must bring back the idea of freedom and the principle of equality, which has

⁷⁷ *Dokumentumok a magyar forradalmi munkásmozgalom történetéből 1935–1945*, op. cit., p. 235.

⁷⁸ Minutes of the House of Representatives, vol. VIII, pp. 1133–1134.

grown and spread since then and should now be valid not only in the political field, but in the economic one as well. They must bring back the idea of fraternity, which has obtained a new meaning in the course of progress and now already means collective social work.”⁷⁹

The 1848 flags had not yet arrived in Budapest when the regime began to worry about another official occasion which could provide the Hungarian people with the opportunity to show its true feelings. “According to confidential information”, the gendarmerie reported on February 21, 1941, “workers with communist sympathies look forward with eager anticipation to the opening of the Budapest International Fair, since they expect Soviet exhibits there. They will seek to exploit this for propaganda purposes by stating that the news that had been spread about Soviet backwardness was not true, and that these stories had been spread by capitalists. The exhibit will prove how much worse the situation of other workers is than those of the Soviet Union . . .”⁸⁰

In order to prevent any demonstrations unfavourable to them, those in charge of the Public Security Department of the Ministry of the Interior ordered that the most experienced detectives of the police and gendarmerie should mix with the attendants and prospective visitors to the Soviet Pavillion and that they should pick out those taking this opportunity to express their feelings of friendship for the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless a great many of the tens of thousands who visited the Soviet Pavillion on May 4 managed to write a few words of greeting in the visitors’ book, which the detectives tried to obtain, but without success. As if guessing what the months and years had in store, visitors sought every opportunity to obtain some souvenir. Many of them managed to obtain the information bulletin, “The Union of Socialist Soviet Republics at the Budapest International Commodity Fair”, which was published for the occasion, others pulled out a stalk or two of wheat from the exhibited sheafs to stick in their buttonholes. When closing time came visitors formed a semi-circle around the Soviet Pavillion and cheered the Soviet Union. The visitors to the Fair rightly felt that those who decided the policy of the country and those in charge of the army knew more precisely, on the basis of official statements, that “Hungarian-Russian relations are correct” and that there “is no pending question between Hungary and Russia.”⁸¹

Nevertheless, when the time for decision arrived, the will of the ruling class prevailed. On June 27, 1941 Hungary was engulfed in an anti-Soviet war against its own interests. In order to make this completely unreasonable and irrational step acceptable to the public, the organs of oppression of the Hungarian government struck in Northern Transylvania and the South Country and arrested Hungarian, Rumanian, Serb, Croat, Slovenian, Jewish and Czech communists. The action lasted from the end of June 1941 to September 20 in Northern Transylvania and resulted in the arrest of 1,210 anti-fascists, and towards the end of the September it started in the South Country. The aim was to prove that the communists, when they were nursing good relations between the Soviet Union

⁷⁹ *Dokumentumok a magyar forradalmi munkásmozgalom történetéből 1935–1945*, op. cit., pp. 251–252.

⁸⁰ Op. cit., pp. 248–249.

⁸¹ PI Archives, fond 653, bundle 3.

and Hungary, were already getting ready to stab the Hungarian army in the back. Terror was used to force them to their knees and the instruments of stirring up race and national hatred were used to divide them.

Those arrested, regardless of nationality, emphasized that the Soviet Union respected the interests of every nation. Solidarity proved to be a living force as much in the torture chambers as it had been in the arena of open political life. This solidarity, as well as the rightful anxiety for the future of the nation helped to trigger-off the Budapest, March 15, 1942 demonstration for an independent Hungary, for freedom, for national liberation, for equal rights for national minorities and for the democratic rights of the working classes.

It was that Hungary which János Vad, an inhabitant of Hódmezővásárhely represented in his letter to Imre Kovács, a factory worker of Csepel and which the police copied, which gave voice to its feelings at this demonstration: “I don’t know what the situation is in your place, but here the Hungarians are split in two. Those who are provided for are on one side, and those who aren’t are on the other, one section is assured that it will remain provided for, the other, which is the burden carrying giant, has to scramble for crumbs. Don’t you think, my friend, that when the slogan is national cooperation, when no Hungarian is expendable from the point of view of the future, this kind of classification is an exceptionally dangerous game? But now I see that my personal grievance has become a social indictment, which only goes to show that you can’t separate the individual from the community, and the future will prove just how correct my complaint is.”⁸²

In order to block the road to that future, the leaders of the regime increased the terror in the closing years of the war. New, open police investigations were ordered in the second half of 1943 and the early months of 1944 in Soroksár, in the Northern-Country, in Northern Transylvania, in the South Country and in the Sub-Carpathian Ukraine. Northern-Country anti-fascists were tried in Sátoraljaujhely and sentences extending over two-hundred years were handed down. After February 1944, ninety-eight men and women were arrested in Sub-Carpathia, and Mór Farkas and his wife and Gyula Ujfalusi were executed. The prison gates could nevertheless be “opened-up”. The Chief Constable of Komárom for instance, complained in his report of November 14, 1944 that Hungarian communists and Soviet and Rumanian POWs escaped in great numbers from the local prison and internment camp, aided by an illegal organization, and that they had started partisan warfare in the forests of the region.

In Hungary, “the natives without a fatherland” increasingly helped Soviet, French and Polish POWs to escape, and took up arms in common with comrades of other nationalities, and the number of “natives without a fatherland” who fought for the freedom of humanity beyond the borders of the country grew as well. Three to five thousand Hungarians fought in the ranks of the Slovak partisans, and more than ten thousand Hungarians fought in the Petőfi Battalion in Slavonia, in the Petőfi Brigade in the Voivodina and in other units of the Yugoslav Army of National Liberation. Hungarian internationalist patriots fought in General Naumov’s partisan army, in the Fyodorov partisan unit, and in the ranks of the Polish, Belgian and French resistance. They tried to isolate those in France from the French saying that they were aliens. The answer of the French was given

⁸² PI Archives, BM. VII. res. 1943–44–1006.

when the picture of the tortured and then executed Hungarian partisan, Imre Békés-Glasz and his comrades was stuck on the walls of Paris with the caption: "The liberators?" Someone wrote "yes" on it the next day and fresh flowers were placed under the photograph.⁸³

Were they truly aliens? Emigrés? Homeless? it was not hopelessness that determined their actions but the certainty of returning home and getting ready for their work at home. It was they who were truly at home, and many of those who had stayed at home were in an alien country. It was due to them that the homeless natives and the native homeless finally met.

The blood shed for the future of mankind by Soviet, American, French, British, Yugoslav, Polish, Italian, Rumanian, Czechoslovak and other victims was not measured by their nationality, their blood was equally red, and all of it nourished the tree of freedom.

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Looking at the period when the series of dangerous adventures of Hungarian nationalism came to an end and the certainty of the meeting of internationalism and national minority interests began, coming to the end of this examination, one might venture to draw a conclusion. The given aspect of the period clearly proves that it is incorrect to turn the total impotence and fatal political bankruptcy of the social forces interested in maintaining Hungarian nationalism into some kind of guilt complex on the part of the reborn Hungarian nation which meanwhile had gone through a total transformation. And it would also be wrong to use the tragic period of the recent past history to acquit the nationalism which was responsible for it.

An examination of the period proves that the internationalist forces started building a bridge over that chasm which nationalism had deepened. In Zoltán Fábry's words this "is the proudest work of man . . . A bridge is the symbol and reality of human contact; its pledge and faith. The humanity of socialism and the meeting of peoples cannot be without it. The bridge is the basis and the every day of the realization of peace. There is nothing without a bridge. The bridge is everything because the bridge is the way of peace. The bridge is the biggest obstacle and enemy of war. The bridge which links up humanity can overcome every inhumanity. The bridge is not an empty phrase. It was reality yesterday and always; true poets and true writers longed for and built the bridge. But the bridge found no base and no soil in yesterday's system. Now the changed reality and new opportunities attract and desire the bridge. We Hungarians must not forget: the bridge meant the decisive awareness of the Danubian peoples. Endre Ady's *Song of the Jacobins* is a basic historic document. Everything that has followed has verified it."⁸⁴

⁸³ See Laroche, G.: *On les nommait des étrangers*, Français Réunis, Paris, 1965.

⁸⁴ Fábry, Z.: *Hidak és árkok* (Bridges and Ditches), pp. 135–136, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, Bratislava, 1957.

Issues Concerning the Alliance Policy in the Era of the People's Democratic Transformation (1944–1948)

by

Ágnes Ságvári

In the course of Hungary's liberation in 1944–1945 there were a number of factors which determined the alliance policy of the working class. On the one hand, there was the disintegration of the old order and the serious losses suffered by its forces, and, on the other, there was the emergence of the formerly oppressed people's Hungary, the democratization of the masses, and the rightful demand for social justice. The cogency and reality of this was supported by the historical fact that of the powers in the anti-fascist coalition it was the Soviet Union which liberated Hungary. The Red Army destroyed the Horthy state machinery, and ensured the way to a large scale democratic transformation. The fact that the Horthy regime, as the last satellite of German fascism, had finally also been defeated made it impossible to proclaim any platform to restore the extreme right wing or the old regime in any way from the outset. Such a programme could not have counted on either domestic or foreign political support.

The cooperation which had developed in the resistance movement during the war years and the struggle for common national interests had to be put on new foundations. The nation had to concentrate all its progressive force on the economic reconstruction of the country and on ensuring the elementary conditions of life. The ravages of the Nazi occupation, the carrying off or destruction of a large part of our nation's cultural and material wealth to the West, and the front line battles which spread through the country for seven months on end caused enormous damage within Hungary. *Forty per cent of the national wealth had been destroyed by the war.* Transportation was completely paralyzed. Budapest and many other towns lay in ruins. Over half of the factories had been damaged or destroyed, and potential production capacity had been reduced by one half. Agriculture also suffered most serious damages. Losses here came to almost 55 per cent of the total damage in the productive branches of economic life. Fifty-six per cent of the livestock and 30 per cent of the power driven machinery had been destroyed. This was all topped by a developing inflation, which finally attained dimensions previously unheard of in the world. At the same time these circumstances created new and concrete possibilities in many respects for the cooperation of the forces desiring to struggle for maintaining the nation's existence, for reconciling their interests, in other words, for a policy of alliance of the working class and the Hungarian Communist Party (MKP).

The Communist Party, as the only consistently revolutionary party of the working class, the party most prepared for the changes which had taken place, was able to base its programme on the objective reconciliation of interests, which was

a continuation, or more precisely, a more developed form of the people's front concept which had been established in the second half of the 1930s. The war was still going on when the concept, formulated in the April 1942 issue of their underground newspaper, *Szabad Nép*, prevailed in communist circles: "The national democratic line, in liquidating German oppression, will also put an end to its domestic support and the reign of the reactionary circles, and will open the way to a national democratic development, which, under new European conditions, is synonymous with a relatively peaceful development to socialism."

In the course of the anti-fascist fight two new features were added to the communist concept of political alliance. On the one hand, they urged that the alliance of the working class be extended to all social classes and strata interested in solving the current tasks, and considered it important to include the best of these strata in the communist movement. On the other hand, the communist parties tried to reach agreement, and in fact to form a government together with those parties and political groups which represented the interests of and influenced the potentially allied classes and strata. They had recognized that the earlier forms of mass movements and party alliances had become out-dated, and instead of the confrontation of the mass movement with the party and its allies there was a recognition of the interrelation of the two forms now. The KMP (which, in September 1944 changed its name to the Hungarian Communist Party - MKP), had taken the stand as early as 1941, that, in the interest of realizing an anti-German national unity, contacts had to be made with the important Hungarian bourgeois parties, including the leadership of the ruling government party. In 1944, on the initiative of the Communists, the Hungarian Front appealed directly to the anti-Hitler Horthyist groups to form a coalition government composed of the representatives of the parties of the Hungarian Front and the army which, by ensuring the free movement of the democratic forces and providing the population with arms, could take the first step towards a democratic rebirth as a part of the anti-Hitler fight.

The conditions for the cooperation outlined above had, in part, matured by that time. With the founding of the Hungarian Front in May 1944 the leading political body, comprising the alliance of the different classes, was already given. They had contacts with all strata of the population including the Churches and the army. Its minimum programme was one which could be accepted by all anti-Hitler groups.¹

An essentially similar viewpoint was expressed in the Yalta agreement by the Allies. In their statement they promised to help the former European puppet states of the Axis Powers to reestablish internal peace and to urge the formation of provisional governments representing all the democratic elements of the population whose duty would be to help form constitutional governments through free elections.

However, the conditions for the popular democratic transformation had only partially been created. First of all, the parties of the Hungarian Front, including even the working class parties, did not have sufficient organizational influence on the various classes. The Hungarian Front did not become a people's front movement embodying the unity of public administration and political organization. For this reason the parties and organizations forming the foundation of the

¹ See the study by István Pintér in this volume.

democratic state and social life had to be organized mainly parallel with or following the liberation of the country. Beyond this, the continued retrogressive ideologies and the nationalist and anti-communist prejudices had to be taken into account. Other matters requiring attention were the lack of political schooling among the masses and the effect of the still existent illusions of certain strata about the Horthy regime. However, as a result of the military activities of the Soviet army, and the anti-fascist struggle, the socialist forces were finally liberated, and the economic strength of finance capital and the large estates, which had cooperated with the German war machine, became crippled. The right wing and the conservative strata lost their credibility, having been compromised by the fascist regime for a quarter of a century. The force of their resistance was first reduced, then broken by the departures of the vacillating strata. Amidst these conditions there was an intensively rapid development of the popular movement and of the forms of practicing democratic power. The popular-national committees, bodies of workers' control in the factories, the militia, and the establishment of a coalition party central government became the political-organizational base for a new type of popular democratic state.

The military operations to liberate Hungary lasted from September 26, 1944 to April 4, 1945, that is, for over six months. In the liberated areas political life and the bodies of public administration were built up gradually. The document summarizing the social and political transformation after the liberation, which had been elaborated by the Foreign Committee of the MKP during its forced emigration in Moscow, was published in the November 30, 1944 issue of the Debrecen *Néplap* under the title "Magyarország demokratikus újjáépítésének és felemelkedésének programja" (The Programme for the Democratic Reconstruction and Progress of Hungary). The Hungarian National Independence Front, formed on December 2, 1944, including the Bourgeois Democratic Party (PDP), the Independent Small Holders' Party (FKGP), the MKP, the National Peasant Party (NPP), the Social Democratic Party of Hungary (MSZDP) and the Free Trade Unions, approved the draft programme of the MKP. It was also approved by the Provisional National Government elected in Debrecen on December 21, by the Provisional National Assembly.² The programme set armed opposition to Nazi Germany, as the main task, but the plan for creating a new post-war socio-political system inevitably received the greatest attention. Regarding home policy it emphasized the consistent liquidation of the organized forces and parties of fascism, of the armed forces of the old regime, etc. In general it demanded the destruction of the remnants of fascism through a movement against it and by decrees of law. It called for the ensurance of democratic rights, and the realization of the economic, cultural and social demands of the toiling classes. These were supplemented by a series of state measures aimed at the creation of a new people's power and advancing the cause of various timely social reforms, among them the radical restriction of the power of the large estates and of finance capital. The basic principle of the programme insofar as the foreign policy of democratic

² The Prime Minister of this government was Miklós Béla Dálnoki. The MKP received three portfolios, the MSZDP and the FKGP received two each and the NPP received one. The independents nominated the Prime Minister and also got three ministerial portfolios. This government composition expressed large-scale national cooperation.

Hungary was concerned was friendship with the Soviet Union and reconciliation between the nations of the Danubian Basin. The MKP saw the guarantee for the realization of these endeavours in the formation of a democratic government functioning on the basis of authority derived from a parliament of popular representation relying on social cooperation.

The illegal Central Leadership of the MKP in Budapest outlined an essentially identical perspective for development on October 2. However, there were certain differences between the two programmes. The reasons for this lay primarily in the fact that they were prepared under dissimilar conditions and were founded on different judgements of the situation in Hungary.

The October 2 draft programme of the Communist Party was prepared in Budapest at a time when there seemed to be a possibility of an armed uprising with the participation of Horthy. Along with the coalition system of government it was in any case deemed essential to support the government with a left-wing movement from 'below', and with economic measures which would restrict capital and establish workers' control over it.

The programme elaborated in emigration, made public at the end of 1944, did not and could not reckon with an armed uprising at home. However, it did unquestionably overestimate the influence of the Horthyist groups and the government bodies they represented. Besides, it wanted to adapt itself to the practice of the developing coalition governments in other countries as far as possible. Therefore the programme did not stress the dominant role of the popular bodies but rather that of a democratic state apparatus guided from above, relying on a coalition of parties.

Although the programme published in Debrecen on November 30 also called for a coalition government, the method and pace of its realization depended principally on the organizational force represented by the most prepared and most organized political factor, the MKP. It became immediately necessary to replace the small illegal party with a new type of mass party, which in number, composition and extensive theoretical activity would be qualified to perform the function of a government party. The party to be organized was to have strong ties with the masses and to become a decisive factor in realizing a policy of alliances to meet the new situation. The Party Leadership stated that "The fight for democracy is not solved automatically by the presence of the Soviet army... The extent of the developing popular rule here will depend primarily on our activity... It is most important that we make use of the political failure of the bourgeoisie, which proved to be unprecedentedly reactionary, and to ensure that the workers lead the fight for democratic transformation". Thus "we must not consider the mass rush to Party headquarters as an opportunist phenomenon. The nation turns to us when it is legally possible to do so."³

The Communist Party, which, when illegal, had hardly a few thousand members, in January 1945 had already 36,000 members in the liberated areas, and at the First National Conference in the May of that year the delegates represented 150,000 party members. In Greater Budapest – the capital and its suburbs – where the illegal party had 1,270 active members, the number of members rose to 26,000 in five months, increasing twenty fold. By mid-May there were Com-

³ PI Archives, fond 274, 2/11.

munist Party organizations in almost every important factory in Greater Budapest. The Party safeguarded and developed its working-class character. In the most industrialized county after Budapest, Borsod, for instance, 63 per cent of the Party members were manual workers. At the same time in Csongrád county, known for its traditionally large agrarian proletariat, 77 per cent of the membership were industrial workers and navvies.

That the rise in membership of the MKP was not of a momentary nature is proved by the fact that the increase continued in the following years so that in the summer of 1946, for example, even amidst the difficulties caused by the sharpening of the struggles concerning party politics and the inflation, there were over 600,000 dues-paying members in the Party.

In the implementation of the policy of alliances, the initiative had to be taken mainly by the people's democratic state, which, by necessity, was being built up rapidly. The various laws and decrees concretized and legalized the "restriction of the bourgeoisie" and the political slogans supporting the petty-bourgeois strata and first of all the working peasantry.

After what could, at that time, be regarded as a long debate of two months, the land reform decree was formulated and published as Act 600/1945 in the March 18, 1945 issue of "Magyar Közlöny", based principally on the proposal of the NPP which represented the poor peasantry. The reform was championed by the MKP in opposition to the bourgeois-liberal draft of the FKGP⁴ which represented the interests of the large landowners. The MSzDP was passive on this issue. In the course of the radical land reform the estates of the war criminals and those who committed crimes against the people were completely confiscated together with all holdings in excess of 575 hectares, including the Church estates. The decree limited the estates to a maximum of 57.5 hectares, and the peasant farms to a maximum of 115 hectares. Taking into consideration the large numbers of people entitled to land, it limited the distribution of land to 8.5 hectares per person and 14.5 hectares to a family.

It did not entrust the execution of the land reform to officials or to "official" bodies but to those entitled to the land themselves, first of all to committees composed of poor peasants. This strengthened one of the cardinal theses of the policy of alliance of the people's democratic transformation and the worker-peasant alliance.

⁴ The National Peasant Party (NPP) was founded in June 1939. A significant role in the formation of this party, primarily composed of the poor peasantry, was played by the radical young intelligentsia, first of all by the "populist writers". The left wing of the party fought for a democratic solution to the peasant problem, from the very beginning, participated in the struggle for the creation of an anti-fascist united front and cooperated with the illegal Communist Party.

The Independent Small Holder's Party (FKGP), which was supported principally by the wealthy and middle peasants, and by the urban bourgeois and petty-bourgeois strata, was founded in 1909 under the name of Independence and Forty-eight Holder's Party. Between 1919 and 1930 it was led essentially by the representatives of the large estate owners: it was reestablished in October 1930. At that time several anti large estate demands were included in its programme and in the first half of the 1930s it formed the government's loyal opposition, but sharply opposed the socialist working-class movement. During World War II its policies were motivated by the fear of fascist German expansion and by anti-Sovietism. After the German occupation of March 1944, the party was forced underground and then joined the anti-fascist Hungarian Front. Following the liberation, it participated in the organization of the MNFF (Hungarian National Independence Front) and in the Provisional Government. In the years 1945–1947 it constituted the main force of the government coalition's right wing, and its right-wing leaders defended capitalist interests.

Important decrees were enacted regarding the reorganization of public administration, the democratization of public life and retribution for various war crimes. (See the January 4, 1945 decrees on the "certification of civil servants" and the "provisional organization of public administration" and the February 26 decree on the "disbanding of fascist political and military organizations".) These decrees eliminated the centres of fascist right-wing organizations, deprived the already frightened Horthyist politicians of their political forums, and at the same time ensured security for the work of the democratic minded civil and public servants. With the introduction of the People's Courts system on February 5, 1945, laymen entered state life and the professional bodies by way of the delegates of the coalition parties.

From the point of view of developing the relations between the various social classes and strata, and of the social content of the governmental alliance between them, the key question was the relationship of the government to the mass movements, and to the people's committees organized by them.⁵ However, no matter what form and composition the alliance had, its nature was first of all determined by the programme approved by its participants, moreover by the interpretation of this programme, and by the attitude of the working class which was the leading force of the alliance. However, the working class was not a static factor, its development and the formation of its political and social outlook were influenced by many factors. Immediately prior to liberation, the Hungarian industrial workers comprised 18 per cent of the country's wage earners and their numbers grew at a faster pace than any other social strata. This is shown by the fact that between 1930 and 1941 their numbers increased comparatively fast, to 170,000 workers. The military operations and the loss in production due to war damage resulted in a decline to 209,000 by 1945, as compared to the 1943 figure of 413,000, but because of its concentration and organization it continued to be the most unified social factor. Prior to the liberation of the country, 55 per cent of the proletariat employed in large factories was concentrated in the area of what is now Greater Budapest. It is therefore understandable that Budapest played a greater role in the political, cultural, and economic life of the country than the capital of any other developed capitalist country. Greater Budapest was the heart and centre of the Hungarian working-class movement. Therefore, the stand taken by the Budapest workers played a significant role in the political development of the country.

At the time of the liberation, the old guard of the skilled workers, first of all in heavy industry, immediately began the work of reconstruction. Despite reduced employment, the ratio of skilled workers rose in comparison to earlier years. As a result, the working class became more homogeneous, its movements gained in

⁵ The National Committees, as the social institutions for public administration, the Factory Committees as bodies realizing workers' control over Capital, and the Land Distributing Committees were revolutionary organizations of power, which attained their posts through elections and embodied the alliance of the representatives of the working masses. Later on, these bodies could have served as the base for the further development of state and social cooperation. However, as a result of the overestimation of the possibilities of the coalition government and of the results of democratization their role gradually declined, and they slowly withered away. For the People's Committees see Ágnes Ságvári: "Popular Organs in Hungary 1944-1945", *Nouvelles Études Historiques*, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1965.

strength, its measures against capital grew in effectiveness, and there was an upsurge in the organizational activity of the working-class parties and trade unions. It was this traditionally most highly cultured group of the organized workers that a large part of both communist and social democratic party functionaries came from.

One of the basic conditions of the reorganization of economic life and of the development of the people's democratic system was to have an increase in production. The most important means for achieving this in the war-torn country was to increase the number of manual workers. Therefore, the rapidly reconstructed industry again absorbed large masses of semi-skilled and unskilled workers. The new strata of factory workers who came mostly from the villages in the 1930s and 1940s and the declassed strata of the small towns had, under the effects of the terror and counter-revolutionary ideology, not even tried to approach the working-class movement. In fact, a large number had been under the influence of the extreme right wing. After the exposure of the arrow-cross movement's demagoguery they had become disillusioned with the old regime and were receptive to the new slogans and methods which expressed their true interests. The new strata of the working class which came from the villages were still bound by strong ties to the villages, and their outlook was in many respects burdened by the effect of their former lives. At the same time this strata radiated and transmitted the effects of the labour movement to the villages thus expanding the social base of the working class.

The majority of these groups of the proletariat, also because of their radicalism, joined the MKP. Therefore, the Party had to reckon with the fact that greater support for the various ultra-radical actions, which unavoidably occur in the process of revolution, would be found in these strata lacking political moderation and understanding.

Workers who had previously remained aloof also joined the social democratic party in large numbers. They did so particularly in Budapest and in the provincial industrial towns where, following the liberation, about 70 per cent of the membership of this party was concentrated. The majority of them regarded the social democratic party as a labour party midway between the Communist Party and the bourgeois parties which would not seek a revolutionary solution but follow a more moderate policy.

This sketchy picture does not, of course, even approximate the complexity of the composition and situation of the working-class. It does, however, indicate that in the new historical situation even the working class itself was in sore need of "political education". A decisive role in this political development of the working-class was played by the two working-class parties and the trade unions. To this end, unity of action between the two working-class parties had to be created at the "summit", in local party life, as well as in the factories where the fight against capital particularly required the concentration of forces. *Therefore the unity of action of the two working-class parties was not an organizational question and not even an issue of the working-class movement in Hungary, but the condition for victory in the fight for power on all levels and in all fields.* In many respects the influence of the proletariat on the other classes of society also depended on this.

The MSzDP began to organize somewhat later than the MKP. This was primarily due to the fact that its old, official leadership expected different foreign and

domestic political developments, i.e., British occupation and a bourgeois liberal domestic policy. The reorganization of the MSzDP and its becoming a factor in government was delayed also by the fact that the section of the party which had played an active role in the resistance movement and was based on labour unity and which had practically held the affairs of the party together from the time of the German occupation remained in Budapest. Only after Budapest was liberated were they able to take over the leadership of the party through inner-party elections.

The first programme-like statement of the party was contained in the document of April 1945 entitled "Mit akar a Szociáldemokrata Párt?" (What Does the Social Democratic Party Want?) As a basic document, it highlighted socialist objectives but stressed the necessity of a democratic transition as well. The document went beyond the general formulation of democracy for it also demanded that the economic foundation for democracy be laid stating that "the new political system can be a lasting one only if its economic structure is also transformed". This is why the MSzDP, lagging somewhat behind the NPP and the MKP, said that it was unavoidably necessary to wipe out the feudal remnants and what is more it should be done under the leadership of the working class since the bourgeoisie had proved itself incapable of doing this.

The programme was not free from certain utopian or doctrinaire features. In agriculture, for instance, in addition to the distribution of the land, it urged the almost immediate development of cooperative farms. At the same time, the platform included remnants of reformist views regarding capitalist development. It defined the objective for industry correctly: "On the one hand, to prepare the banks, insurance companies, sources of energy, mines, and basic industries for a mixed economy through nationalization, and on the other, to curtail the disruptive nature of the capitalist system." However, it proposed to follow the obsolete Beveridge plan as a means to reach these aims.

With regard to the political structure the programme started out from the failure of the pseudo-parliamentarianism of the preceding quarter of a century. However, its realization was hindered by the lack of a concrete programme of action, by delays in forming organizations and by the conservatism with which it assessed the political structure of the country seeking to change it on the basis of the social democratic programme dating back to the turn of the century.⁶

However, at the turn of 1944–1945 primarily practical issues were raised: would the communist party's concept of ensuring the leading role of the working class prove successful? In other words, would it be possible to form an alliance of the two parties, sufficiently close for the united front of the workers' parties to become the base for the class alliance which could attract the left wing of the coalition parties? On the other hand, and this was the concept of the FKGP, could the nucleus of the coalition be formed by an alliance of the FKGP and the MSzDP, and if so, would the communist party remain as a minority within the coalition?

There were precedents for both concepts. This was the concept, which served as the basis for the Small Holders' – Social Democrat agreement of 1943, which in many respects served to prepare the ground for the later transformation. The Communist-Social Democrat agreement in the autumn of 1944, however, fixed

⁶ See the study by Tibor Erényi in this volume.

the principles of united action of the two parties, of the establishment of a unified trade-union movement, and the perspectives for forming the united party of the working class. The theses of the unity document were reiterated in the January 21, 1945 agreement of the two working-class parties and a Coordinating Committee was formed to regularly coordinate the points of view.

However, the cooperation of the two working-class parties was accompanied by heated struggle and debate. The two wings of the MSzDP had different interpretations of cooperation. In the factories, where there existed practically only the two working-class parties, there was a struggle for hegemony, so that the differences of opinion inevitably led to conflict between the two parties. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, unity of action was the determining major factor in the relationship between the two working-class parties, and this affected the worker members of the MSzDP as well as the urban left-wing petty-bourgeoisie who had joined the party.

In the few months following the liberation, the land reform brought about one of the most profound social transformations in the history of Hungary. The land reform extended to 35 per cent of the country's total arable land, giving land to 642,000 persons, and houses or house sites to 250,000. It liquidated the large-estate owners as a class, and with that the central figures of the village population were no longer the landless agricultural workers but the small peasants with lands of 0.6 to 5.7 hectares who formed 70 per cent of the peasant population.⁷

Partial compensation to the former owners of the land that was taken away, and the setting of the maximum of the land which could be kept at 57.5 and 115 hectares, won the sympathies of the middle peasants for land distribution, and neutralized the large landowners. It was, however, obvious that the more than half a million people who had newly received land could keep it only if the government, though hardly able to give economic aid because of its limited material resources, developed into a definitely left-wing one, and if it gave at least political and administrative help to the peasants so as to protect them from the exorbitant interest rates of the kulaks and the estate owners who sued for return of their lands.

All this, however, could be raised only as a possibility. The land reform brought the revolutionary forces in the villages to the surface. But because of the economic difficulties, and, to a no lesser degree, the effect of the extremely conservative, highly influential Catholic Church, there were signs of political withdrawal among the village population, who had for decades lived in intellectual oppression. In 1945 and early 1946 it was primarily the radical minded former poor peasants who continued to work as landless agricultural workers who actively supported the policy of the left wing.

By the autumn of 1945 the village organizations of the communists had 150,000 members. Other organizational forms for the mass relations of the communists and the working peasantry were also established. Among them were the Association of Land Workers and Small Owners (FÉKOSZ) composed of agricultural workers and small holders, and the Association of New Owners and Land Receivers (UFOSZ) representing the interests of the new owners. The reorganized cooperative movement was also meant to include these new sections.

⁷ Шомьяи, Магда: Земельная реформа 1945 года в Венгрии (Somlyai, M.) (The Hungarian Land reform of 1945), *Acta Historica*, 1967, tom. 13, Nos. 1–2, pp. 103–162 and Nos. 3–4, pp. 313–374.

The combined influence of these organizations extended only to a small part of the peasantry, and for this reason the village organizational activity of the coalition parties was of particular importance.

The Hungarian National Independence Front included two expressly peasant parties: the FKGP and the NPP. The FKGP was primarily the party of the well-to-do old landowners and the middle peasantry whose fortunes were growing, while the NPP carried on its organizational activity primarily among the poor and small peasant population.

The NPP appeared in Hungarian public life as the party of small peasant radicalism. In its document entitled "Mi a Nemzeti Parasztpárt?" (What is the National Peasant Party?) it announced that through its membership "... the people who had been excluded from the nation now want to share in its work of reconstruction and be equal members of a people's democratic Hungary... It has no reservations in taking a stand for the preservation of the country and is in the front lines fighting for its liberation." The party's land reform proposal was formulated in this spirit and this was the spirit in which it participated in the land distribution and took the initiative in the democratization of public life.

The NPP as a definitely left-wing party, was a consistent supporter of unity of action with the Communist Party. It proclaimed the right to an independent peasant policy as part of and a condition for the worker-peasant alliance. It was in this sense that it proposed to the FKGP that they work in "close cooperation". At the same time the NPP emphasized that it had its own separate task which was to represent the interests of the working peasantry and the owners of dwarf and small plots, so that none of them be pushed into the background by any other interest.

The NPP was generally clear about the class content and operative principles of the new people's state. It had confidence in the revolutionary people's committees, which arose from the popular movements, and in the maintenance and development of the coalition government.

The other large peasant party in the country, the FKGP had never taken root among the poor peasantry and those who worked as both farmhands and domestics. However, having been one of the opposition parties in the Horthy regime, its traditions continued to live among the small peasants of the trans-Tisza region (the Eastern part of the country), and many political personalities who had been brought up in oppositionist traditions also remained with the party. In the early period, these strata made up the main body of the FKGP and the majority of the members of its parliamentary group came from this group.

However, as soon as this party was joined by the rich peasants, by the gentry, by urban and small town employees, who kept up the traditions of the old estate-owners, and by the members of the former Horthyist officers' staff, the outlines of the right wing, which had retreated after the Liberation but was now increasingly organizing, became increasing by distinct. This trend became stronger in the FKGP with the influx of the right-wing bourgeoisie and even of the big bourgeoisie. With the sharpening of the existing contradictions regarding the anti-fascist struggle, and particularly as the practical tasks of democratization became the order of the day these forces made up the main strength of reaction within the coalition. The FKGP's becoming a focus for reaction was already complete, when the smaller bourgeois and religious parties, which were formed

following the liberation, also joined it in order to create bourgeois unity. This made the organized influx of the majority of the bourgeoisie, and in fact of the Horthyist political and state administrative group into the coalition possible.⁸

The factors opposed to the course of the people's democratic development had not yet come to the surface at the beginning of 1945. The factors holding the coalition together were the common objective of creating a new state life, the laying down of the foundations for a democratic foreign policy, the complete liberation of the country, participation in the anti-Hitler fight as well as efforts for the creation of conditions to enable the country to stand on its feet economically and these proved to be stronger than the disruptive forces. At the turn of 1944-1945 the contradictions arising from the methods of implementing the adopted regulations became sharper but they practically extended also to the course of democratic development and its perspectives.

However, the period up to May 1945 was characterized by the ascendancy of the left-wing and a revolutionary upsurge. To be sure, the bourgeoisie did participate in the coalition's class alliance and this caused sharp class conflicts. However, at that time the bourgeoisie was bound by the obligations of the coalition by way of the FKGP. The unified programme of the Hungarian National Independence Front was the programme of coalition and this, willingly or not, made the bourgeoisie, in a certain sense, supporters of the people's democratic revolution.

In May 1945 World War II and the fight against fascism came to an end in Europe. International political life was confronted with a new situation. May 1945 was the overture to a new stage in the history of the Hungarian people's democracy. The establishment of order in Hungary's international situation could begin. Following the introduction of measures to create democratic order in the country, the provisional period in the home policy came to an end with the unification of public administration and with the government moving to the capital in April 1945. By April, the framework for democratic party movements had been shaped. Each of the coalition parties had to take a stand on what the political and social development should be. What direction should Hungarian democracy take? Should it continue as a people's democracy in which the working class and the poor peasantry cooperate with the middle strata and through the economic and political restriction of capital prepare the socialist transformation; or by halting the revolutionary process let the leadership fall into the hands of the bourgeoisie, which, drawing the middle class and the peasantry under its influence, would execute a liberal consolidation? These were the two possible alternatives and the alliance policy, which these represented, crystallized and came into conflict in the summer of 1945.

There was but one method of approach to the socialist perspective, continuation of the policy of national cooperation. By the summer of 1945, it had become clear that the central political task on which the vitality of the future system depended was none other than the repairing of the war damage, which was far in excess of preliminary calculations, and the recovery of the national economy. The

⁸ The nature and tactics of the parties formed at the turn of 1944-1945 is discussed in Ságvári, A.: "Les partis et leurs programmes en Hongrie au lendemain de la libération (1944-1945)", *Acta Historica*, tom. 13, Nos. 1-2.

objective of the national cooperation was defined most precisely by the May 1945 conference of the MKP: "The fight for reconstruction."

At the same time, the steering committee of the MSzDP met on May 10, 17 and 21. The meeting discussed the party alliance and the changed relations of the trade unions and the state. The meeting was marked by the fight between the two wings, the right and the left, the background of which was the increasing heterogeneity that resulted from membership recruitment. But this time the viewpoint of the left-wing, which relied on the working masses prevailed in the leadership of the party, so the judgement of the two working-class parties was essentially alike regarding the conditions for reconstruction in the fields of the economy, state politics and the workers' movement.

The Communist Party, above all, tried to ensure stable state leadership and reinforce central authority so that the supreme authorities could further the interests of reconstruction and the national economy through the channels of state intervention (provision of credit, control and allocation of materials, price and wage regulation, placing orders, etc.) at the expense of the interests of the capitalists. The economic management bodies of the MSzDP approved the proposal that the state assume key positions.

From the point of view of the whole of the national economy, it was impossible to neglect the nationalization of the raw material and basic material industry and the expansion of what belonged already to the state sector. This also coincided with the intent of the Independence Front regarding the confiscation of fascist property.

From the very beginning, the state regulations included the plan for worker supervision of production and the extension of the political and economic jurisdiction of the factory committees locally and the trade unions nationally. *In the new type state, where capitalist property relations still prevailed, the tremendous job of reconstruction could not be carried out without economic control by the workers.*⁹

As economic reconstruction became a central political issue it became indisputable that the success of reconstruction, in the above outlined system, depended on a further leftward development of the people's democratic system. The interactions of economic reconstruction, alliance policy and social perspective were defined most clearly and simply by the May congress of the Communist Party already referred to: "The National Party Congress calls the attention of the Communists to the fact that the role of the MKP and, beyond it, that of the entire working class in the leadership of the country will be in direct proportion with their achievement in the work of reconstruction."¹⁰

The political staff lined up also on the opposite side to express their views and programme of action, and to issue slogans on which to base their own "alliance policy". However, since the only significant bourgeois party, the FKGP had no

⁹ On the basis of the experience of the spontaneously formed factory committees, a Ministry of Industry decree on February 15, 1945 provided that Factory Committees be elected in all workshops employing fifty or more workers or employees. These committees had the state-ensured right to intervene in production, distribution, wage and price issues.

¹⁰ *A Magyar Kommunista Párt Országos Értekezlete 1945. május 20–21* (The National Congress of the Hungarian Communist Party, May 20–21, 1945).

platform, and therefore also lacked ideas regarding economic policy, the initiative was taken by the leading circles of the National Association of Factory Owners (GYOSZ) who were well versed in politics. It is true that in Horthy's Hungary, too, big capital exercised the greatest power, but since they had not compromised themselves directly on the side of German fascism, they could become the spokesmen of the bourgeois democratic system. They agreed that the system of state intervention which functioned even prior to and during the war should be maintained, for such efforts had been apparent in Hungary for decades. The role of the state's central economic policy was also justified by the catastrophic situation of Hungary's economy. But they also knew that a trend towards state monopoly existed in all of the countries which had fought in the war.

Capitalist circles also considered the securing of raw material supplies, the carrying out of the reparation deliveries, the promotion of agricultural production, and the regulation of the price and wage levels to be the most important tasks of the state. These made state credit, state orders, and – what is more – nationalization, as special methods of financing, unquestionably necessary. Formally, therefore, the two economic concepts coincided to a certain extent, but their interpretation of the task of the state was essentially different. As early as May, but even more so in the summer as reconstruction advanced, the GYOSZ endeavoured to limit the system of state intervention or to regulate it in the interests of capital. Their experts agreed with the granting of credit but without control over its use. They agreed that a body with the authority of a summit ministry should be established – however, it should not be led by the working class parties, but by the FKGP. Furthermore, they agreed that economic plans be coordinated, but not by the Council of Ministers which was predominantly left-wing, but by the National Economic Council which included the GYOSZ and was headed by Ferenc Nagy, the political leader of the FKGP.¹¹

August 1945, the period of "political calm," seemed to be the proper time to announce the programme of bourgeois transformation. This was actually done at the "National Board Meeting" of the FKGP on August 20. At this meeting there was a clash between the contradictory class interests, the groups guarding various historical traditions and the plans for the maintenance of the coalition and for developing opposition policy. The leadership of the FKGP urged the National Board to approve the objectives of the Hungarian National Independence Front as a programme of action, and to accept the current practice "which in essence culminates in the creation of new political friendships and alliances."¹²

The opinion of the right wing was presented by Ferenc Nagy, the party's General Secretary, in the name of the Peasant Association, a mass organization ostensibly independent of the party but under its guidance, emphasizing the fundamental contradiction between the working class parties and the FKGP. Although he described the maintenance of the coalition as necessary, he regarded the anti-worker party unity of the peasant parties, the cooperation with the

¹¹ In 1947, at the time of the nationalization of the banks and the crisis in the coalition, Ferenc Nagy was in Switzerland as the Hungarian Prime Minister, and he failed to return. Since then he has been living in the United States, and is one of the leading figures in the emigré groups organized against the people's democracies.

¹² Tildy, Z.: "Felelősségtudat" (Responsibility), *Kis Újság*, August 9, 1945.

Catholic Church on the basis of a common world outlook and the implicit support of the right wing as the axis of the future alliance policy.¹³ It was in this sense that at the meeting he emphasized the "leading role" of the "peasantry", more precisely, of the peasantry represented in the Peasants' Association, both with respect to a coalition government and economic policy. This was related to his standpoint on the continued maintenance of capitalist property relations. Ferenc Nagy formulated his theses by referring to the Hungarian peasants' "way of life based on private ownership".

The FKGP also called for decisive changes in the state system. Instead of the system of people's committees, which embodied the toiling classes, it called for the revival of local representative bodies led by the village wealthy, and instead of people's democratic centralization it urged the development of the activities of self-governing bodies which relied on reactionary public administration. Parallel with this it sought to eliminate the people's courts and other anti-fascist regulations as rapidly as possible, and to stabilize the conservative elements.

Therefore, the proclamation of its platform in the summer of 1945 was the overture to two perspectives, and, to large scale, the struggles between the two policies of alliance. The communist party proposed that the December 1944 statement of the Hungarian National Independence Front be the basis for the alliance of the parties. It called for the alliance embodied in the coalition to go beyond the party frameworks and include the classes interested in the rebirth of the nation. It called for cooperation in the economic reconstruction by all strata, including the bourgeoisie, interested in starting production, the petty-bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia, who had been passive because of the misery and the hopelessness of their situation.

The FKGP based its alliance policy on a "wait and see" attitude. It built its hope on nationalism, which they thought was sure to arise as a result of the war defeat, on continued anti-Soviet and anti-communist prejudices incited still further at the time by the Catholic Church led by the Primate of Hungary, Mindszenty. The plan served to change the democratic nature of the party while keeping its peasant basis. They intended changes in foreign policy to play a decisive role in the realization of these plans.

With regard to foreign policy, the FKGP took a position of "wait and see" again. It built its hopes on the American atom monopoly and on the immediacy of a Western-Soviet conflict, the "function" of which would have been nothing else than "to ensure the material and power position of a small middle class here, in the Danubian basin".¹⁴

¹³ According to Ferenc Nagy there were three important stages of transition: the parliamentary elections, the signing of a peace treaty, and the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from the country. (Nagy, F.: *Struggle Behind the Iron Curtain*, MacMillan, New York, 1948.)

¹⁴ This "stupidity and incomprehension in matters of foreign policy," almost unique in Europe, was lashed out at in a book by Gyula Szekfű, one of the founders of the Hungarian school of the History of Ideas, a well known Catholic political figure who started as a legitimist and turned into an active anti-fascist. Szekfű, Gy.: *Forradalom után* (After the Revolution), pp. 167-169, Cserépfalvi Kiadó, Budapest, 1947.

Thus, in the summer of 1945, two counter-poles of alliance policy became crystallized in Hungary. One of them wanted to enforce the programme of the MNFF. They saw the precondition for this in the maintenance and development of the people's committees, in the extension of their political supervisory function, in worker control exercised through the factory committees and in the centralization and far-reaching democratization of state administration. The other party's aim was to stop the popular democratic revolution through the resurrection of the former system of self-government, placing the public administration of the rural areas in the hands of the urban and rural bourgeoisie and ensuring the prerogatives of the old administration with its "expert knowledge". Thereby, they wished to strengthen the alliance between the old group and the new leading circles of the bourgeois restoration which had come to the surface.

The working-class parties saw the ensurance of the people's democratic content of the alliance in the close cooperation of the two working-class parties. The FKGP, however, experimented with unifying anti-urban peasant (meaning private ownership) interests. The united action of the working-class parties reinforced the unity of the Independence Front in that it attracted the left wings of the other parties, and provided them with points of support in their struggles against their own right wings. However, the bloc around the FKGP, supported also by the Church, did precisely the opposite; it endeavoured to attract the right wing of the MSZDP and the NPP, and to cause a shift in the balance of power within the Independence Front without having to initiate a change in form.

The working-class parties emphasized those tasks which reinforced cooperation, first of all, by building up the economy, while the right wing of the coalition directed attention to those elements which sharpened the difference, and to the formal questions of democracy. Its plan was not unrealistic. It could build on economic resources, on counter-revolutionary ideology, and on the retrograde force of the almost untouched old state machinery.

Open conflict took place in the autumn 1945 elections. The time of the elections was not determined by the right wing. International agreements compelled the country to hold the elections, and Hungary's diplomatic recognition depended on this.

The left-wing forces were motivated also by reasons of domestic policy when they proposed the comparatively early date for holding the elections. The Communist Party hoped that the end of provisionality would stabilize the government. Besides, there was an unrealistic evaluation of the strength and influence of the opponents of the system. This illusion was increased by the inertia of these strata as well as by the fact that the true relation of forces was obscured by the revolutionary preponderance which dominated in the first half of the year, by the activity of the numerical minority of society and by the passivity of the vast majority. The date of the elections was finally decided by the fact that because of the increase in inflation and the foreseeable deterioration in living conditions any later date could but increase the camp of those distrustful of democracy.

The election was held in an extremely tense atmosphere. The failure of the first session of the Five Power Foreign Ministers' conference in September, and that of the preparations for the Hungarian peace treaty appeared to justify the right wing

of the FKGP which had built its policy on the sharpening of Soviet–Western contradictions.¹⁵

At the November 1945 parliamentary elections the FKGP received 57 per cent of the votes, the MKP received 17 per cent and the MSzDP 17.4 per cent. This changed the political balance of power. (The rest of the votes were as follows: 6.8 per cent went to the NPP, while 1.6 per cent was received by the Bourgeois Democratic Party and 0.2 per cent went to the Bourgeois Radical Party.) Even then, the enemies of the people's democracy could not openly oppose the system, but at the same time the political ignorance and gullibility of the working masses was highly dangerous. This could increase the prospect of a turn to the right prepared under democratic slogans. The Communist Party had to pour "vinegar and bile into the sweet water of revolutionary democratic eloquence". In many ways, this analysis of the situation in April 1917 by Lenin, and his appeal that "the proletarians must teach the people to distrust the bourgeoisie",¹⁶ fitted Hungary's conditions at the end of 1945.

The extent of the political ignorance and gullibility of the working masses became numerically measurable. The election system itself made it difficult to clarify the fronts for under the new election law the entire adult population of the country had the right to vote, with the exception of war criminals and the imprisoned. This confidence was based on an alliance policy expressing the community of interest of all the working classes. But in general the electors were "made into democrats" by the circumstance that in voting for the FKGP even the extreme right wing remained within the coalition.

In parliament, the 55 per cent left-wing majority in 1944 was succeeded by a 57 per cent single party majority with right-wing leadership. In possession of the parliamentary majority, the bourgeoisie, through the Small Holders' Party, endeavoured to change the political course of Hungary. Having a majority, they wanted to give the parliament increasing jurisdiction. Parliament was to have been the political center empowered to limit the sphere of authority of the president of the republic, and reduce governing by decree.¹⁷ This action was supplemented by renewed attacks against the republican state form and against the principles of the peace treaty under preparation (first of all regarding the question of borders.)

The coordination of the classes and strata with conflicting interest around the FKGP and close to its political concepts, through direct and indirect means, had already made considerable progress. There was, nevertheless, a large gap created in this alliance when the attack on the great achievement of the popular system, the distributed land, began.

¹⁵ The Foreign Ministers' Council, in which under the Potsdam agreement the Soviet Union, the United States, Great Britain, France and China's foreign ministers participated, held its first session between September 12 and October 3, 1945, in London. There were differences in views, first of all regarding the policy to be pursued in order to establish democracy in Europe. The Soviet Union, in contrast to those who vacillated, was for definite measures to eliminate the remnants of fascism.

¹⁶ Lenin, V. I.: *Selected Works*, vol. II, pp. 29 and 31, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1947.

¹⁷ See: Kertész, D. S.: *Diplomacy in a Whirlpool (Hungary Between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia)*, p. 147, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 1953.

At the head of those demanding a revision in the land reform were, if not the FKGP itself, some of its exposed leaders. A sharp class struggle developed in the rural areas, with those who had received the land, irrespective of their party alliance on the one side, and the former estate owners, notaries, officials and various representatives on the other.

The left wing found itself in a disadvantageous position in face of the capitalist – small holder attack. On the government level, they managed to maintain the status quo when the portfolios were allocated, to establish an Economic Supreme Council under Communist leadership for the central management of the economy, and to pass a criminal law to protect the Republic. However, the attacks of the reaction gave rise to doubts in the ranks of some sections of the workers and even among the members of the working class parties as to the correctness of the democratic road and the indirect methods, and one appeal followed the other demanding an end to the coalition, and strike movements replaced organized struggle with anarchy.

The MKP was justly concerned by the situation in which "on the one hand the activity of reaction was growing while, on the other, the spiteful defiance and polarization of the workers was increasing; the gathering of forces on the two poles was threatening to break up the cooperation of the national forces".¹⁸ And what is more, the supporting pillars of national cooperation, the left-wing forces, were becoming split in a certain sense. Three parties faced the unified, or at least ostensibly unified FKGP, and their coordination and unity of action could not be always ensured.

Polarization was also taking place within the various parties. By mid-summer it was already apparent that the crystallization of the counter-poles would cause ferment within the parties. The MKP was the only one to definitely undertake the unpopular tasks of a governing party, but it was comparatively unified and therefore it could devote all of its strength to convincing the radical "left wing" which had lost its way. Within the MSzDP a new right wing, imbedded in a worker and trade union environment, appeared alongside the center which held the leading position and the left wing which criticized the coalition policy on the basis of left wing doctrine. This school of thought denied the national and political tasks of the trade unions and sought to limit the activities of the trade unions exclusively to the narrow task of protecting their immediate interest. With the announcement of its policy of venting grievances, an attempt was made at a spectacular break at the trade union congress in December 1945.

Nationalism became stronger in the NPP which had not yet been wholly unified, and there was a revival of the peasant romanticism which had not yet been overcome. It was even proposed that the party join the peasant unity organization, formed at the initiative of the Peasant Association, in other words, it should abandon the independent organizing of the poor peasants and the worker-peasant alliance. In this party, which had, until then, wholeheartedly believed in a people's democratic development, middle-of-the-roader, petty-bourgeois ideas gained ground.

¹⁸ Rákosi, M.: *A magyar demokráciáért* (For Hungarian Democracy), p. 150, Szikra, Budapest, 1947.

Was it inevitable for polarization to lead to the disintegration of the allies and to the narrowing down of alliances? Events proved the opposite. It was not the "centre parties", in other words, the middle strata, but rather the "extremist parties", that is, the parties which consistently acted in the name of the two basic classes which set the programmes. In this period their struggle was characterized by the fact that both the right and the left wing made use of increasingly forceful means, closed their ranks, and above all, they wanted to stabilize their bases. The right-wing grouping of forces has already been referred to. The left wing also began to recognize that the Anglo-American (i.e., international) and capitalist-clerical (i.e., domestic political) aggression made it necessary to protect the system even by radical means and to maintain and even extend the alliance policy of the working class.

The winter of 1945-1946 created a tragic situation for the working strata. The worth of the collective labour contracts signed during the summer, which had brought partial improvement was swept away by inflation, and the wage system soon had a minimizing rather than a stimulating effect on living standard trends. The devaluation of the salaries of civil servants only seemed to strengthen the belief that the new system would leave them to their fates.¹⁹ The position and mood of the village landless was similar to that of the workers. The situation of those who had just received land was much worse than that of the more well-to-do peasants: they had no overstock to be sold, nor did they have money with which to buy the means of production. When the ownership of the land that had been won with such great difficulty was also endangered, the atmosphere became extremely tense.

The MKP, which had in the meantime become organizationally stronger, elaborated new tactics in a series of discussion which began in November 1945. First of all it clarified its views on revolutionary attack in connection with the combinations of mass movements "coming from below" and government measures from "above" as well as the need for more organized left-wing groups within the coalition. As for the extension of the alliance, while in July and August 1945 the prevailing opinion of the Party was that the conservative bourgeoisie had to be involved in reconstruction at all costs, in the spring of 1946 the Central Leadership concluded that "it is our interest to clear up the fronts". As a counter-effect to the increasingly open anti-democratic stand of the reaction, the unity of the working-class parties became stronger. The poor peasantry needed the effective help of the working class to defend the achievements won, particularly with regard to the distributed land. Therefore the conditions for counter-attack came into being.

In December 1945 there were spontaneous anti-capitalist working-class actions. The large demonstration in January 1946 under the slogan "No land will be returned" as well as the popular movements in February against corruption in the rural and Budapest public administrations supported the high level demands. The worker - poor peasant party alliance within the coalition and the organized al-

¹⁹ For more information on questions of economic life see: Berend, T. I.: "Contribution to the History of Hungarian Economic Policy in the Two Decades Following the Second World War" in *Acta Historica*, tom. 13, Nos. 1-2, pp. 3-47, 1967.

liance demonstrated in the actions of the toiling masses was expressed in the Left-Wing Bloc²⁰, formed on March 5, 1946 in which, apart from the two working-class parties, the NPP and the Trade Union Council, took part. The Left-Wing Bloc was an alignment on the lines of a people's front and it prevented the center parties from opening the gates to the right-wing elements while it simultaneously carried its centrist followers to the left. The fact that the Left-Wing Bloc acted within and not against the coalition was highly important. I emphasized that its objectives coincided with the obligations which the coalition had already undertaken and it also reflected the recognition that these objectives could only be attained by shifting the coalition to the left.

The goal was to regain the position of the left wing, but it was even more than this. While up to the summer of 1945 the anti-German struggle for independence and the creation of a democratic state system was the main task, in early 1946 it was the strengthening of the popular nature of democracy. Until the summer of 1945, the framing and the execution of the land reform was the task. In early 1946, however, the problem was to defend by all means the agricultural reform which had already been accomplished and the interests of the poor peasantry. During the months following the liberation the economic policy aimed at starting up economic life through joint efforts while one year later it was to restrict big capital which had recuperated and to defend the class interests of the working class.

There was also a noteworthy change in the composition of the alliance. While until the summer of 1945 all anti-German forces, including the bourgeois liberals, found their place in the coalition, in 1946 it was clear that the conservative, bourgeois concept of democracy no longer fit into the framework of the coalition, moreover, it was becoming increasingly alienated from its programme. Earlier the whole peasantry agreed with the principle of the land reform, but when the time came to defend the distributed lands only the poor peasantry rallied. The rich peasantry was opposed and the middle peasants, at the most, evinced well-intentioned neutrality. Despite all this, the March 6, 1946 statement of the Left-Wing Bloc described its objectives in concrete and unmistakable terms when it demanded: 1. the expulsion of the right wing from the FKGP and thus also from the coalition, 2. the cleansing of public administration, 3. the nationalization of the oil wells and of the bauxite mines, 4. the nationalization of the "key factories" of heavy industry, and 5. the state supervision of the banks.²¹

If a comparison is made between the October 25 manifesto of the parties of the Independence Front prior to the elections, and the statement of the Left-Wing Bloc it becomes evident that they contained similar objectives: to improve the economic situation, to punish the speculators, to stop the depreciation of money, to carry through with nationalization, and to suppress reactionary endeavours.

²⁰ The most important demands of the Left-Wing Bloc uniting the left-wing forces were given at a rally of 300,000 on March 7, in Budapest. The statement approved at the mass meeting demanded the removal of the reactionary elements of the FKGP from the coalition, and the defence of the land distributed in the land reform.

²¹ The stages in the nationalization process were the following: the coal mines and their electric power stations were taken under state supervision in January 1946, and nationalized in June, then in November the three largest heavy industry factories were put under state control. In March 1948, all industrial plants employing more than one hundred workers were nationalized.

However, the March document already followed a definitely left-wing, popular democratic course. The tasks facing the country justified the maintenance of the parties allied in the Independence Front. All sections of the population were interested in stabilization and the reconstruction of the national economy. It also coincided with the interests of the peasantry and the urban petty-bourgeoisie to maintain the principle of capitalist economy and to restrict big capital which also endangered small private ownership. Nevertheless, the ways and means of their realization set off a wave of revolutionary changes.

One of the questions of the alliance policy of that period, which is still being debated, is whether the Left-Wing Bloc was simply a transitional form which, having successfully fulfilled its task of shifting the coalition and, within it, the FKGP to the left, had to be inevitably dissolved in 1947, or could this popular front form have been kept with the advance of the socialist revolution.

After the victory which was won through the strength of the popular movement, Mátyás Rákosi, the General Secretary of the MKP, wanted to return to the old methods: "We must on the whole return now . . . – since the people's movements have done their job – so as to strengthen the prestige of central power . . . And we must reduce those regulations and phenomena which make it difficult to form a democratic . . . central power."²² This question of alternatives – centralized power or popular movement – did not correspond to the actual situation. Historically, it would have been more favourable had the original concept been asserted according to which the Left-Wing Bloc and the popular committees would not have replaced the government bodies but would have supplemented and controlled them.

On March 12, the FKGP accepted the demands of the Left-Wing Bloc and this made it possible to implement them in the spring and summer of 1946. After this the question of stabilization came to the forefront of the political struggle and that provided further opportunities for the expansion of the class alliance.

The May Day slogan of the Left-Wing Bloc in 1946 was: "Stable currency, a solid peace, order!" and this expressed the guidelines of the alliance policy in early 1946. Within the framework of stabilization a satisfactory price and wage system for the working people was elaborated, and the foundations for an economic policy, which would aid the gradual transformation of ownership relations, were laid down. As for foreign policy, the basis for cooperation was the preparations for the peace treaty which would settle the international position of the nation and restore its sovereignty. Regarding domestic policy, the tasks in which complete cooperation could be realized were the removal of bourgeois elements from the FKGP and the reduction of personnel in the reactionary state administration.

The stabilization²³ which took effect on August 1, 1946, marked not only an economic regulation of historical importance, but also the success of the alliance

²² Rákosi, op. cit., p. 222.

²³ Stabilization, as initiated by the MKP, was achieved on August 1, 1946, with the creation of a stable new currency, the *forint*. This marked the end of the hitherto greatest inflation ever known (one new *forint* was equal to four hundred thousand quadrillion *pengős*). The gold content of the forint was set at a level lower than the purchasing power of the 1938 *pengő*: one forint was equal to 0.28766 *pengős*. (One dollar was equal to 11.739 *forints* or 3.376 *pengős*.) The stabilization meant not only an end to inflation and the implementation of measures aimed at balancing the state budget, but it also created the basis for the system of economic intervention by the people's democratic state.

policy of the working class, and a favourable beginning for the further development of the revolution. The successful execution of financial reorganization led to the enhancement of the political prestige of the working class parties. The financial policy, which accompanied it, influenced the distribution of both resources and responsibilities in a way that was favourable to the workers. As a result, it helped to increase production and brought about a general rise in living standards. Amidst the given historical conditions this indirectly contributed toward creating the prerequisites for socialism.

In the autumn of 1946, the questions of social transformation came clearly to the forefront. The period had come to an end when the programme of the Independence Front expressed the common platform of the coalition parties and, through them, of opposing classes. The development of Hungarian democracy and the whole of Hungarian society was characterized by the sharpening of contradictions and the polarization of forces. The central paper of the MKP, *Szabad Nép*, wrote on September 22, 1946 that "Ferment, vacillation, and expectation can be felt among the broad strata of the people on both the right and the left".

The objective socio-economic relations and the subjective factor equally motivated the formulation of a new programme. There was a need for clarity as to the stage the struggle against capital had reached as well as to the type of regulations needed for the further drastic restriction of capital. An examination had to be made as to whether or not the alliance policy so far pursued could be applied in the next stages of the transition to socialist revolution. A reply had to be given to the major political question of whether or not the working class parties had made proper use of their share of power and whether the communist party had followed an opportunist or revolutionary policy when it subordinated the radical movement to the interest of gradual progress.

The peaceful development of the revolutionary transformation was endangered by the bourgeoisie which still had large economic and political reserves, so that excluding them from power became unavoidable. The most appropriate form and method had to be found for turning the strata supporting the bourgeoisie into active participants in the preparations for socialist revolution. The Third Congress of the MKP, which began on September 28, 1946, dealt with these issues. The importance of the congress lay in the fact that it theoretically summarized the preceding course of development, *elaborated the people's democratic road to social transformation*, clarified the major tasks of the period and, though this, accelerated the course of the practical struggles.

The central slogan and condition for accelerating the development in a socialist direction and simultaneously for expanding the alliance with the middle strata, above all, with the working peasantry, was the stabilization and expansion of the people's democratic system. The Party Congress stated that "Only a people's democracy can make it possible for the country to advance towards socialism by way of social development, without civil war!"²⁴ The debate which developed at that time on questions of bourgeois democracy and people's democracy encom-

²⁴ *A népi demokrácia útja. A Magyar Kommunista Párt III. kongresszusának jegyzőkönyve* (The Road to People's Democracy. The Minutes of the Third Congress of the Hungarian Communist Party), p. 335, Szikra, Budapest, 1946. (Hereafter: The Road to People's Democracy.)

passed practically all areas of social, cultural and economic development, but for the purposes of this article only the practical effects of the alliance policy will be touched on.

With regard to the concept of people's democracy, the standpoint which developed in the communist party was that it differed qualitatively from traditional bourgeois democracy. "People's democracy is a type of bourgeois democracy", wrote the paper of the MKP, "in which the profit economy and exploitation by big capital is limited, in which democratic state power is controlled by the working nation and the workers and peasants have decisive influence. In a people's democracy the peasantry is an ally of equal standing with the working class against the economic exploitation and political reaction of finance capital, while in the common bourgeois democratic democracy the peasantry is the dispossessed today of capital against the working class."²⁵

But as it appears from the above statements, form and content became mixed up in the terminology. Parliamentarism and the multi-party system were equated with bourgeois democracy, civil war with the dictatorship of the proletariat, and revolution, which is a process, was viewed as an act. This formulation unquestionably lacks theoretical accuracy. But the starting point was correct parliamentarism and the multi-party system in Hungary can be suited for preparing a socialist revolution and this differs from the form of class alliance which had at that time been realized only in a single country, in the Soviet Union. This formulation emphasized that the peaceful and non civil-war way of gaining power presupposes proletarian hegemony as the starting point for creating revolutionary predominance but it postulates the elimination of civil war at the same time. The leaders of the MKP, in equating revolution with civil war or armed uprising, necessarily viewed it as an armed transformation, as an explosive, single act. As a result they viewed the peaceful road as the opposite of revolution.

The demand for creating a new, timely programme appeared at both poles of the coalition almost simultaneously. The communist party mobilized for the further development of the revolution and the realization of the people's democracy, while the September 1946 meeting of the National Board of the FKGP set the aim of blocking the revolutionary development and of creating a bourgeois democratic system. "It is the opinion of our people", stated Ferenc Nagy, Prime Minister, leader of the party, that "development is development only if consolidation is established on the basis of our bourgeois democracy."²⁶ The MKP tried to win over the middle strata, first of all the peasantry, on the basis of a stable worker - poor peasant alliance, for the realization of its programme and for the struggle against big capital. The programme of the Small Holders' Party, with the leadership of its right wing, attempted to build up such a system of alliances in which the working peasantry as proprietors, would be the ally of the bourgeoisie in a bourgeois democracy based on the inequality of wealth and on formal democracy.

Consequently, the socio-political struggles were marked by the debate on "bourgeois or people's democracy" for nearly a year, but the debate really con-

²⁵ "Fordulópont" (Turning Point), *Szabad Nép*, September 22, 1946.

²⁶ Nagy, F.: "A nemzeti erőfeszítés korszaka következik" (Now follows the Era of National Effort), *Kis Újság*, September 8, 1946.

cerned the question of power. The leaders of the FKGP rejected the grounds for raising the issue of "bourgeois democracy or people's democracy".

They attempted to define bourgeois democracy so as to rouse in the peasantry the demand for an alliance of interests with the bourgeoisie as well as the feeling that order, peace and private ownership were endangered. Therefore, the party's paper emphasized that "...never, under no circumstances whatsoever will we allow the overthrow of democracy which is the political way of life of the Hungarian people. We demand a system of popular rule..." Therefore "the Independent Small Holders' Party opposes and disapproves of the perpetuation of political struggle, it wants order, peace, a living, lively democracy, radical development and public welfare, without breaks and pointless risks..."²⁷

On the ideological field the FKGP stressed "peasant unity", while organizationally it wanted the Peasant Alliance, which was under its leadership, to be recognized as the representative of peasant interests instead of the trade unions of the agricultural workers and small holders. The reason for its argument that local elections should be held as soon as possible was that it wanted to mobilize the old county public administration and have it ready for the carrying out of an eventual right-wing take-over.

Perhaps the most important demand of the adherents of bourgeois democracy was that an end be put to nationalization. In March of that year the FKGP was already prepared not to agree to further nationalization. The official paper of the Catholic Church, *Új ember*, attributed an ideological significance to big capital remaining intact.²⁸

In the autumn, the right wing leaders of the FKGP considered the time ripe for attack. The support of forces outside the coalition would have been ensured by the opposition groups known as the Sulyok Party.²⁹ This party, led by the opposition leader lawyer Dezső Sulyok, was composed of those former Small Holder members who were expelled from the party at the demand of the Left-Wing Bloc in March 1946.

The first step would have been the establishment of a so-called peasant bloc which, with the unification of the two peasant parties, would have given the groups with a bourgeois orientation a parliamentary majority. It took months for the NPP to realize the danger threatening its existence: "If the right wing of the Peasant Party goes with the Small Holders' Party then it would have no other way out than to accept the political leadership of the Small Holders' Party..." said Péter Veres, the well-known author, at that time chairman of the NPP, at the National Committee Board meeting of November 1946.³⁰

Since it was no longer possible to form a government without the political organization of the workers, the worker-wing of a government alliance based on the peasant bloc would have been the Social Democratic Party which supported the principle of bourgeois democracy. The proposals of the FKGP for the revival of the small holder-social democrat alliance did not fall on deaf ears in the social

²⁷ Ibid., October 22, 1946. Nagy, F.: "Békésben meghirdette..." (Announced in Békés...) and the editorial of October 8, 1946, "Munka vagy harc?" (Work or Struggle?)

²⁸ "Államosítás vagy magántulajdon" (Nationalization or Private Property?), *Új Ember*, September 22, 1946.

²⁹ Sulyok, D.: *Zwei Nächte ohne Tag*, pp. 360-368, Thomas Verlag, Zürich, 1948.

³⁰ PI Archives, fond 284, III.

democrats' right wing. The left wing, however, quoting the lessons of Weimar was, in the people's democracy vs. bourgeois democracy debate, definitely in favour of the further drastic development of democracy. The party which had rallied its masses under the banner of "democracy today – socialism tomorrow" could not join with the FKGP when it rigidly opposed all social and economic changes. The distinct danger of counter-revolution convinced the whole party, with the exception of the right wing, of the correctness of the left wing course. A factor which also favoured the spread of this concept was that at that time the trend of working-class unity dominated in the European social democratic parties.

Bourgeois democracy as an objective was so isolated in the MSzDP that only Károly Peyer, who led the party in the 1920–1940 period and was a well-known member of the right wing, and his followers continued to favour it. A programme of this kind could only be announced by them as an opposition programme. Although the Peyer memorandum³¹ of December 1946 was not without social demagoguery, and even emphasized party unity, the plenary session of the party leadership rejected the demands of the memorandum on account of their being opposed to a workers' united front. The Thirty-fifth Congress of the MSzDP, in February 1947, reinforced the resolution of the plenary session and excluded Peyer from the new leadership. The hope of domestic bourgeois circles and western observers in Budapest, that Peyer and his group would gain the upper hand and "form a new coalition around an alliance of the two moderate parties, with a different domestic and foreign policy,"³² was shattered.

One of the major slogans of the Third Congress of the Communist Party – "We are not building the country for the capitalists, but for the people" – attracted all the democratic forces, especially since the slogan was accompanied by concrete proposals. They included, "the reorganization of the national economy in the interests of the people", in which "guarantees to small owners were combined with an increase of the socialist elements of the national economy". While radically restricting the profitmaking possibilities of big capital, it called for the development of the state and village forms of production. It demanded better service for the low-paid workers and employees, a wage system for the intelligentsia which would encourage creative work, and give institutional support for scientific-technical experimentation. From this time on, a left-wing orientation spread noticeably in the ranks of the intelligentsia.

The congress resolved that the Party has to pay more attention to "protecting the just interests of the middle strata and keeping them informed (private craftsmen, small shop owners, etc.)". But it did not lose sight of the fact that "within the coalition the struggle was essentially around the question as to whom the majority of the peasantry would follow: would it go with the workers and forward towards democratic development or backwards with big capital, where reaction wanted to take the country". For this reason, the other slogan of the

³¹ In the memorandum presented to the leadership of the MSzDP on December 8, 1946, several right wing social democrat MP's headed by Károly Peyer, attacked the views of the party leadership on those economic and political issues which promoted the development of the people's democracy, and criticized its policy of cooperation with the Communist Party.

³² PI Archives, 253/1–146. On the situation analysis of the Agence France Press (AFP), December 18, 1946.

congress was important: "Drive out the people's enemies from the coalition." In the interests of realizing this, discussions were held between the parties, but the MKP endeavoured to influence its coalition partners first of all by activating the masses. The congress expressed the view that "the struggle against the reactionary right wing was not aimed at the FKGP as a whole nor against its peasant masses. The democratic section of the FKGP has to be rallied for an alliance with the Left-Wing Bloc in the common struggle against the right wing, thus creating the base for a new, democratic and stable government in Hungary."³³ The agricultural programme, approved by the congress, also served this objective. The essence of this policy was to prevent the unlimited capitalist development in agriculture, and to regulate the differentiation of the peasantry. The programme devoted great attention to the spreading of the cooperative movement along with the stabilization of peasant small ownership, and to urging investments aimed at increasing agricultural production.

Following a long delay, since it was not possible to reach agreement on a government level, the Left-Wing Bloc issued a public appeal to the FKGP. In this appeal it demanded the taxation of high incomes, a struggle against speculation, increased production of consumer goods, further nationalization, and, as a prerequisite for all this, it repeatedly urged the expulsion of the right wing from the party. The FKGP accepted the economic demands, but, possibly because it felt that its strength was declining, was unwilling to make any political concessions.

A favourable opportunity for executing the political turn arrived, when in January 1947, a conspiracy organized under the name "Magyar Közösség" (Hungarian Community), which had intended to restore the Horthy regime, was exposed.³⁴

This event called attention to the fact that there were organized anti-democratic forces within the country, which, though having no strong influence, could rely on the large number of senior civil servants with pro-Horthy sentiments. The political objectives of the participants in the conspiracy temporarily coincided with the plans of the right wing and the centre of the Small Holders' Party. The series of American experiments at interference in connection with the conspiracy showed how concerned the United States government circles were about not allowing the bourgeois forces in Hungary to weaken. The MKP exposed the conspiracy to the working masses. Thus, it mobilized the masses of workers, provided the urban petty-bourgeoisie with food for thought, set in motion a slow process of unrest in the FKGP and created a favourable opportunity for accelerating the cleansing of public administration.

The most prominent spokesmen of bourgeois democracy were themselves thoroughly compromised at the time of the right-wing attack. It also became clear that the branch of bourgeois democracy which corresponded to the programme of the FKGP in many ways resembled some variety of the Horthyist conservative restoration. However, this could not count on gaining support among the working

³³ The Road to People's Democracy, ... pp. 65, 332 and 333.

³⁴ The "Hungarian Community" was a counter-revolutionary organization which aimed at restoring the capitalist regime. Its leaders were Horthyist officers and right-wing FKGP politicians. After the exposure of the conspiracy in early 1947, the FKGP, under the pressure of the democratic forces, took a stand in opposition to the reactionary right wing.

masses of Hungary nor even within the ranks of the liberal intelligentsia. Therefore, bourgeois democracy as an objective was defeated. Among the unsolved questions was that of nationalization, first of all the nationalization of the banks which held most of the industry in their hands.

A decisive turn in this field was the Three Year Plan of the MKP, made public in early 1947. This programme successfully tied in the concept of planned economy, which had spread throughout Europe, with the tasks of completing the restoration and giving a new impulse to the Hungarian national economy. It called for state regulations of a socialist nature, and the creation of job opportunities serving the interests of all the working strata.

The MSzDP accepted the concept of a planned economy, and elaborated a well-founded plan project. In the several-month long debates, the joint draft plan of the two working-class parties was crystallized. At the outset, the inter-party talks of March and April in which the Trade Union Council also participated, ensured the unified stand of the Hungarian working class.

It was a difficult and complicated task to represent the interests of the peasantry in such a way so as not to violate the interests of the wage and salary earners, and so that the decree on taxing the rich landowners,³⁵ should not hinder the work of the middle peasants. At the same time, the plan's objectives had to be such which would convince the working peasantry that the Three Year Plan and the anti-capitalist development of the national economy corresponded to the individual interests of the peasants as well.

The MKP saw the prerequisite for financing the Three Year Plan and ensuring its commodity stocks in the nationalization of the large banks. It counted on the support of the Left-Wing Bloc parties for the programme. It was obvious at the outset that the NPP, as a small peasant party, which was traditionally opposed to the oppressive bank interest rates would approve the nationalization.

The Social Democratic Party vacillated at first and found it hard to withstand the pressure of the domestic bourgeois and the Western social democratic parties, but being a worker-petty-bourgeois party, it approved the nationalization of the banks after some internal struggle.

The debate on the planned economy gave rise to new upheavals in the whole of Hungarian society. The kind of planned economy which was sought for and conceived in the West envisaged a rise in capitalist production and an increase in capitalist profits through state support and the introduction of various new taxes which had a serious effect on the population. This kind of concept might have met with the approval of the representatives of the Hungarian bourgeoisie, the National Association of Factory Owners and the capitalist experts. However, a Three Year Plan, the realization of which depended on limiting profits, extending the authority of the factory committees, and centralizing control and which rejected foreign loans and sought to finance itself through the nationalization of the banks and through its own internal reserves, was unacceptable to them.

³⁵ In order to overcome the economic difficulties, which endangered the achievements of stabilization and the successful launching of the Three Year Plan, it became necessary in the spring of 1947 to take a number of economic and fiscal measures. One of these was the introduction of a tax on capital which was aimed at using the war and inflation profits to reinforce the financial reserves of the Three Year Plan. The tax which was extended to property valued in excess of 150 thousand *forints*, and land in excess of 15 *cadestral holds* (1 c.h. = 2.27 acres) had to be paid by the owners in *forints*, in equal monthly installments.

The FKGP, which had undertaken to represent the interests of the bourgeoisie, could only give a negative reply to the plan of the working-class party. But its leading group had to take up the fight, though on disadvantageous grounds and at an unfavourable time. However, it was obvious that an open defence of big capital might lead to complete isolation, or to a split within the party. The majority of the party members were peasants. However, the small peasants, and even the more well-to-do middle peasants, were not concerned with protecting the interests of the banks and this finally brought about the defeat of the right wing.³⁶

Ferenc Nagy, seeing that not only the political soil but also the economic basis for bourgeois restoration had been shaken, could only hope for the restoration of the bourgeois order through the forceful intervention of outside forces. For that reason he openly turned to the United States, and in fact, as has already been mentioned, he left the country. His example was followed by other right-wing leaders, people in important state positions. The treason of Ferenc Nagy and the leading group of the FKGP naturally caused a further shift to the left in that party. An inter-party meeting on June 10 voted to begin the nationalization of the banks and to prepare for state control. This meant that the Hungarian National Independence Front had openly broken with the bourgeoisie.

The new coalition government which took office in June 1947 already embodied the features of the transformed coalition and the bourgeoisie was not represented in it. In his inaugural address, the new Prime Minister, Lajos Dinyés, who in the 1930s belonged to the left wing of the Small Holders', said that Parliament, the parliamentary cooperation of the parties, the "large-scale cooperation of the working people" and the extra-parliamentary alliance of the classes and social organizations constituted the pillar of the coalition. This coalition decided to launch the Three Year Economic Plan on August 1, 1947, and set August 31 as the date for the elections which had to decide on the revival of the MNFF.

Opposition to this hastened the leftward shift of the parties in the MNFF, and these parties becoming the representatives of the working classes and strata. During the preparations for the elections, new political groups, new parties³⁷ of the urban bourgeoisie, the conservative civil servants, the right-wing strata, big capital and the Catholic Church were formed. From the very first they remained outside the coalition and, in fact, opposed it. With that they essentially became the representatives of the classes and strata whose interests ran counter to those of the working classes.

The 1947 parliamentary elections constitutionally reinforced the changes which had taken place in the balance of power, giving the people's front type of coalition a parliamentary majority. Having obtained 60.8 per cent of the votes the Hungarian National Independence Front held 66 per cent of the mandates.

³⁶ For more information on the introduction of the planned economy see Ránki, Gy.: "The Socialist Reorganization of the National Economy and the Five Month Plan (1948)", *Acta Historica*, 1964, tom. 10, Nos. 3-4, pp. 273-305.

³⁷ As a result of the policies of the left-wing forces, contradictions appeared ever more openly in the right-wing opposition. In the spring and summer of 1947, there were already six opposition parties. They were the Freedom Party, the Independent Hungarian Democratic Party, the Hungarian Independence Party, the Democratic People's Party and the Christian Women's Camp. These, with the exception of the Freedom Party, which dissolved in June and July 1947, all participated in the August 31 parliamentary elections.

The achievements in the alliance policy created the basis for promoting the class character of the struggle without the Communist Party relinquishing its policy of national cooperation.

Modern Hungarian history refers to the period from the 1947 elections to the fusion of the two working-class parties in June 1948, as the "Year of the Turn". This was the year when the leftward shift of the coalition was completed, when a government which was the direct transition to workers' power was formed (September 1947), and in the final analysis, the year of the victory of workers' power in Hungary. The "turn" was primarily in the political views of the population as could be seen from the results of the election. The majority of the working class supported the working-class parties. The Communist Party, with its 22.7 per cent became the strongest party in the coalition; in the mining areas it received 70 per cent of the votes. In Greater Budapest it increased the number of its votes by 53 per cent, in other words it received 27.5 per cent of the total votes here.

The MSzDP received 14.6 per cent of the votes. During the preparations for the election, the competition between the two working-class parties for the leadership of the working-class movement had sharpened. The situation was made even more complicated by the attempt of the MSzDP to secure an absolute majority by winning former Small Holders' votes, which in any case were of a highly dubious political value, and thus establish a government led by the Social Democrats. In reality, the majority of the former Small Holders' votes went to the right-wing parties outside of the coalition. In the final analysis the MSzDP lost 3 per cent of its 1945 votes, and retained only its old guard.

Therefore the elections showed that the influence of the working class parties had grown and been stabilized, first of all, among the workers; the ratio of votes for them in the large industrial cities was in excess of 50 per cent. Trends in the membership of the working-class parties indicated even more active political commitment. For instance, a survey of 667 Budapest factories in October, 1947 showed that 38 per cent of the workers in the factories were members of the communist party, and 34 per cent of the social democratic party. In the factories employing more than 1000 workers, where the total number of workers came to 154,104, this ratio was 41 and 39 per cent.³⁸

The peasant base of the coalition also grew. The parties of the Left-Wing Bloc received a total of 45.4 per cent of the votes in the villages. The MSzDP, primarily an urban party, had little influence in the villages. In contrast, the number of votes for the communists in the rural areas roughly doubled. In comparison with 1945, the radical NPP increased its votes by about one third (to 8.7 per cent) while the FKGP had heavy losses. In contrast with its 57 per cent of 1945, now only 15.1 per cent of the electors voted for it. However, it is noteworthy that the old, militant groups of the party in the Transisza region for the most part remained intact, and withdrawals were only from "the right".

However, the great achievements did not eliminate the considerable influence of the expressly retrograde elements, which still existed in Hungarian society, manifested in the 39 per cent of the votes received by the extra-coalition parties. This influence was due to the activity of the clergy which was almost unique with its extreme right-wing position in Europe and the political naivety of a large sec-

tion of the population, first of all of the rural population. It was no accident that it was precisely after the left-wing victory in the 1947 elections that the last attempt was made to form a bourgeois bloc. The slogan was again bourgeois democracy. The main argument was that the world outlook of the bourgeois parties and of the working-class parties were contradictory. The Hungarian Independence Party, which later dissolved, and which was strongly opposed to people's democracy (called the Pfeiffer party after the name of its leader) proposed cooperation even by fusion, alliance or cooperation with the opposition parties and with the FKGP that was within the coalition, in order to "protect bourgeois ideas".³⁹ The plan was not quite unfounded, for its soil was the panic which had broken out in the social democratic and small holders' parties following the elections, and in their attitude of revenge. It was only through a series of passionate internal struggles that the line of the FKGP and the MSzDP was clarified, and the left wing won an irreversible victory.

The main support of socialist development, the worker and poor peasant masses, were also dissatisfied. While, as a result of the wage increases, the living standards of the workers improved, unemployment, which effected hundreds of thousands of people, and the rise in food prices due to poor crops, had an unfavourable effect on public sentiment.

In order to solve these problems many decrees were adopted between October and December 1947, which helped to dissolve the Pfeiffer party, that had been organized as a right-wing centre, and to ensure the smooth functioning of the parliamentary system. Progress was being made in the elimination of the mixed nature of the national economy. In November, the law on the nationalization of the banks was made public and in March 1948 factories employing more than one hundred workers were nationalized. As a result, the socialist sector of the national economy embraced nearly all of mining, four fifths of factory industry, all of large scale transport, and on the economic level this also served as a basis for winning and fulfilling working-class power.

To sum up: The year of the turn brought decisive changes both in the field of objective socio-economic conditions and in the subjective factors, in public opinion, and in the home and foreign policies of the parties. In this period, the central issues of alliance policy were the following: winning and activating the absolute majority of the working class; clarifying the theoretical issues of further development, including socialist revolution, the directives of the foreign policy of workers' power and its alliance policy; and, most of all, increasing the direct mass influence of the communist movement.

The views and attitudes on foreign policy naturally exercised great weight throughout the entire post-war period. But while in the first years and mainly until the signing of the peace treaties the differences between the friends of the Soviet Union and the western orientated circles did not become antagonistic, in the atmosphere of the United States' intervention in Greece, and the cold war, which started with the confrontation regarding the Marshall Plan, the question of Hungary's foreign political orientation became a direct dividing line in home policy. The relationship to the socialist Soviet Union and to the neighbouring people's

³⁸ MSZMP Budapest Political Committee Archives, 3/5-27.

³⁹ Pfeiffer, Z.: "Szétforgácsolódunk?" ("Are we Being Dispersed?"), *Ellenzék*, August 30, 1947.

democracies became an essential constructive element of the national character of the alliance policy.⁴⁰

In the months following the 1947 elections there was great need to counter-balance the vacillations which still existed within the coalition, to rally the supporters of the MKP's policies, in some cases by increasing the number of party members. Though several important issues of party building, decisive for its further development, had not yet been cleared up, they seemed to believe that the increase in numbers was the most expedient way, despite the fact that there were warnings about the harmfulness of forced membership.

The endeavour itself to "win over the decisive majority of the industrial workers" and that "the means for this was the organization of party membership"⁴¹ led to an unrealistic rise in MKP membership. By early 1948, 8.9 per cent of the population were members of the Communist Party.

The other question was whether the Communist Party shall be the leader of the alliance policy, or its means and organizational framework. As the leader of political life the Party played a leading role. Besides this, it undoubtedly endeavoured to be a mass party and at the same time the "framework" of the alliance policy as well. Later, after the unification with the MSZDP this trend was strengthened and led to the fact that though the number of worker party members increased, their ratio within the party declined. While in the autumn of 1946, 65 per cent of the membership were industrial workers, by the end of 1947, this had been reduced to 44.2 per cent. In the spring of 1948, 35 per cent of the members were workers, 23 per cent were members of the intelligentsia and 29.2 per cent were employees or in other categories.⁴² There is no doubt that this trend was harmful from the point of view of the party and the alliance policy alike. The danger was that should the party become the "framework" for the alliance policy, its social and ideological composition would become diluted and this, in a subsequent, more difficult period might paralyze the Party and disrupt the unity of its political action. However, the influence of these contradictions were overcome at that time by the fundamentally democratic atmosphere of the Party.

There was no clear interpretation of the leading role of the Party either. The problem arose as to how the Party could maintain its political position in the movement after working-class power is established and party rivalries have been transcended. Would it recognize in time the danger inherent in monopoly, which may give rise to an over-emphasis of the administrative, organizational elements of the leadership? Would it be able to counter-balance those endeavours which, with the weakening of democratic centralism, would advance the rise of centralism?

The question of the leading role of the Party was closely related to the interpretation of the leading role of the working class. The creation of the organiza-

⁴⁰ For more details see: (Ságvári, A.) Шагвари, Агнеш: Влияние международных политических событий на венгерскую внутреннюю политику в период народно-демократической революции (The Influence of International Events on Hungarian Domestic Policy during the Period of the People's Democratic Revolution), *Studia Historica*, 1971, No. 63.

⁴¹ *Pártszervezés városokban és üzemekben* (Party Organization in Towns and Factories), p. 2, MKP educational textbook, 1947.

⁴² See PI Archives, 2/5-1902 and 2/3-1944.

tional unity of the two working-class parties helped to solve this. The rapprochement of the MKP and the MSZDP went through several phases. In late 1944, by setting aside the debate on strategy in the resistance movement, agreement was reached on the methods of struggle. In early 1945, the two parties formed a political unity of action to accomplish the tasks of the people's democratic development and to drive back the forces of restoration. At the beginning of 1946, the standpoints of the two parties were close in many theoretical debates regarding the road to socialist transformation, the theory of revolution, and concept of the party. The turn to the right of the West-European social democratic parties provided the thrust towards the reconciliation of foreign and home policies. On the basis of the identity of views, developed by the first half of 1948, and the modern Marxist-Leninist platform and practice in Hungary, theoretical-organizational unity was established, and announced at the June 1948 Unification Congress of the two parties. The formation of a unified working-class party, the Hungarian Working People's Party (MDP), reinforced the position of working-class policy. Amidst the given situation in Hungary the separation of the two working-class parties would not have resulted in increasing proletarian influence among the middle strata but in strengthening the influence of the petty-bourgeois elements on the working-class movement.

The expansion of the socialist sector, along with the changes in power, put the extension of proletarian hegemony on an economic level. It made possible the rational use of the available resources in the national economy. With the rise in investments, employment increased (by about 150,000 people between 1946 and 1948), and in the course of 1948, as a result of constant wage increases, the real income of the workers was 40 per cent higher than during the stabilization period of 1946. This, together with the social benefits introduced on a general scale in the people's democratic system, improved the living conditions of wage and salary earners, first of all, of working class families. But the living standards of the population were still below the pre-war level although they had risen by more than one third in a two year period.

The greatest achievement of this era was that *workers were placed in the key positions of state and economic life and a great part of the present-day intelligentsia, who came from that sector, received its education through extensive further training*. However, the realization of the socialist revolution made it necessary as well as possible not only to activate individuals in public and state life but to include the working class as a whole. The largest class organization, the trade union, was best suited to fulfill this role. The trade union movement gained eternal merit by giving a foundation for the people's democracy, and in starting up production. It directly connected large working masses, by means of various committees, with the practice of power and the workers' control of capital. In 1946 and 1947, it played a significant role in the anti-fascist mass movement and in the Left-Wing Bloc. It also turned the scale in favour of the revolutionary wing in the coalition. In the year of the turn, the trade union movement was in the vanguard of the socialist transformation of property relations and in launching the Three Year Plan. It is true that there was not complete unity in the working-class movement in estimating the tasks of the trade-union movement. The Social Democrats stressed rather the protection of direct social interests and trade-union activity. Despite this, the factory committees and the entire trade-union movement were an important

training ground for worker unity and the political education of the working class, and their importance was not underestimated either by the opposition or by the working class parties.

At the June 1948 Unification Congress, the point was made that the possibilities for trade-union activity had been increased by the fact that "the hard struggle within the trade unions carried on with the right-wing social democrats would come to an end", and they believed that the independent protection of the interest of the trade unions would be asserted more clearly.⁴³ However, since the prevailing view was that the trade unions have a political function only during the period of struggle for power and amidst the conditions of a transitional, mixed economy. Following the transformation of property relations and after power has become united, its role was therefore limited to satisfying the social and cultural needs of the workers. The fact was, however, that on the basis of the traditions of the Hungarian movement, the trade unions, together with the factory committees, could have become institutions, among other things, for the struggle against the bureaucratic excesses of the new state, and for the development of labour democracy. Later, the united party, the MDP, by relegating the trade unions to the background, deprived itself of the political activity of the very organization which had united the vast majority of the working class under essentially revolutionary leadership.

After the bourgeoisie had lost its governmental and economic positions, instead of trying to change the system directly, its main means of struggle in the economic field was to slow down development and incite anarchy, while it supported conservative, retrogressive trends in the field of politics. This did not mean that the class struggle had stopped but that its forms had changed in a number of ways, with regard both to government and economic activities and to daily political life. Therefore the content and form of class alliance had to be changed too. In the period of the peaceful transition to socialist revolution the restrictions on capitalists and businessmen developed into their liquidation, while reinforcement of the alliance with the urban petty-bourgeoisie and the peasantry became the guiding principle for the entire historical period. The recognition of this was reflected in the economic policy of the MKP formulated in February 1948, when it initiated the gradual termination of the further development of the state capitalist tendency, of capitalist property relations in industry, commerce and other fields of the economy, moreover, in such a manner that these measures "should not, if possible, cause sharp conflicts in the government coalition and any major disturbances in economic life".⁴⁴

With regard to agriculture, the policy, which became the standard, was that "in a people's democracy there is the possibility to construct a cooperative system of the working people, with the support of the state relying on the nationalized sector of the national economy, which by driving the bourgeoisie out of trade, and

⁴³ *A Magyar Kommunista Párt és a Szociáldemokrata Párt egyesülési kongresszusának jegyzőkönyve* (Minutes of the Unification Congress of the Hungarian Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party), pp. 314–315, Szikra, Budapest, 1948.

⁴⁴ "Irányelvek a Magyar Kommunista Párt gazdaságpolitikájához" (Guidelines to the economic policy of the Hungarian Communist Party). Issued in: *A Magyar Kommunista Párt és a Szociáldemokrata párt határozatai 1944–1948* (The Resolutions of the Hungarian Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party 1944–1948), Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1957.

with the gradual transition from private farming to cooperative farming and with the reorganization of agricultural output, would serve to drive back capitalist influence and exploitation in the national economy in general, and would in particular serve the socialist development of agriculture."⁴⁵

The view that "the restriction, displacement and gradual elimination of the exploiters will obviously increase their resistance and therefore, the class struggle will become sharper,"⁴⁶ was already in the platform statement of the MDP and later became the source of considerable distortion, but at that time it had no significant influence on economic and alliance policy.

The political plan for the maintenance of the class alliance and for its anti-capitalist development was also based on domestic conditions. In Hungary the role of the transmissions in the classical sense of connecting the masses with the party, had receded, and this was proven by the fact that the membership in the various mass organizations – with the exception of the trade unions – could not even approach the size of the Party membership. However, with the establishment of a unified Marxist-Leninist mass party, the possibility for creating a people's front directly led by the working-class party, was given. Two forms of the class alliance were considered possible. One was the cooperation of the coalition parties, which, representing the political characteristics of the various classes and using the parliamentary form, would essentially embody the unity of the government and the political alliance in the dictatorship of the proletariat. The other form was a council system based on national committees representing popular public administration which would realize the unity of state administration and the elected body of the movement.

The former, the development of the coalition into a people's front, seemed the wisest thing to do. The platform of the MDP stated, "... The Hungarian Working Peoples' Party views the Hungarian people's democracy as a special, comparatively peaceful transition to socialism." With that it emphasized, as an equal element, that it was possible and in fact necessary to tighten up the alliance with the other parties of the Independence Front.⁴⁷

Agreement was reached with regard to practical policy. The Fourth National Party Congress of the National Peasant Party in April 1948 pointed out that "the great economic and social problems of the peasantry can and must be solved on the basis of the people's democratic policy, through the elimination of capitalism, the execution of the Three Year Plan, and the building up of the cooperative movement".⁴⁸ The FKGP also drew conclusions from the social changes which had taken place in the country. Accordingly, the base of the party would have to be the small and middle peasants, and the leadership of the organizations would have to be transformed accordingly. With that the FKGP opened new perspectives for its own development.

⁴⁵ "Cooperative guidelines of the Hungarian Communist Party", op. cit., p. 564.

⁴⁶ Minutes of the Unification Congress of the MKP and the SzDP, p. 348.

⁴⁷ Op. cit., pp. 348–349.

⁴⁸ *Az NPP VI. országos pártgyűlése 1948, április 4–5* (The Sixth National Party Congress of the National Peasant Party, April 4–5, 1948), pp. 4–5, Budapest, Globus, 1948.

In order to avoid any sort of party rivalry, the leadership of the MDP emphasized that, instead of the loose cooperation of the parties, a close cooperation among the democratic forces would be needed in the unified mass organization of the Independence Front. This type of concept of the people's front might have equally been caused by inexperience, or by a lack of confidence or impatience with the leaders of the coalition parties. However, in the spring of 1948, the question was still open. The theoretical uncertainties which had already appeared and the rush, which hindered further development, were dwarfed by the great achievements of the period between 1944 and 1948. This did not minimize the importance of the theoretical and practical novelty of the people's democratic road to socialist revolution. The democratic road was a new stage in the history of the countries taking the road to socialism. It has many lessons regarding the policy of alliance for the entire international working class, and is a contribution to the advance of the Marxist-Leninist theory of state and revolution.

The Changes in the Social Structure of Hungary and the Main Questions Concerning the Alliance Policy (1949-1956)

by

András Zsilák

The circumstances of the post World War II revolutions and of the socialist construction initiated after their victory differed considerably from those amidst which the Great October Socialist Revolution had taken place and the building of socialism had begun in the Soviet Union. Though certain essential features of the October Revolution and of the building of socialism in the Soviet Union also prevailed in the development of the socialist revolutions following World War II, this development had special characteristics. One of the most important of these characteristics was expressed precisely in the development of the relationship between the different classes. The new international balance of power and the interdependence of the struggle for democracy and for socialism made it possible and necessary for the parties to shape their policies of alliances in a new way and in conformity with the new situation, so that the working class would advance on the basis of a broader unity of the social forces. In this new situation, in its struggle for political power and, subsequently, for socialism, the working class could also win over social forces which at the time had not supported the working class in Russia. All of this obviously influenced the forms and methods of the class struggle as well.¹

As a result of the afore-mentioned causes, the victory of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Hungary did not bring about a significant political re-grouping of classes, though it changed substantially the conditions for the development of their relations. As the building of socialism became the new task, it became necessary to broaden the alliance of the working classes and to achieve their closer cooperation, as well as to increase the political isolation, economic restriction and expropriation of the exploiting classes. This required, first of all, that the political activity of the working masses be enhanced, that they be intensively involved in directing the state and local governments and economic life as well as that their economic needs be increasingly satisfied. Favourable conditions for this were brought about by the existence of workers' and peasants' power, by the consolidation of the leading role of the united party of the working class, by its greater authority and popularity as well as by the moderation and subsequent cessation of the manoeuvring for positions among the coalition parties.

However, after the victory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the relations of the working classes had to change not only quantitatively but qualitatively too. The circle of working class allies had to be broadened and closer cooperation

¹ This question is dealt with in Ágnes Ságvári's study in this volume.

achieved on the basis of the new content and in the interest of new goals. In the earlier period of the people's democratic development the alliance of the working class and the non-proletarian toiling strata had been based primarily on the protection of the latter's small property. This cooperation corresponded not only with their interests but with their personal aspirations as well. However, when the building of socialism began, when the alliance gained new content and new goals, a contradiction arose between the authentic interests and personal aspirations of the small-scale producers.

The objective basis of cooperation between social classes is their community of interests. The real needs of small-scale producers for economic security, for the modernization of production and the improvement of social, cultural and health facilities, objectively coincide with the socialist interests of the working class. However, these common interests can only be realized through a further transformation of conditions in agriculture and through the spreading of modern socialist large-scale farming. But this meets with the opposition of the small-scale producers who cling to private property and to the old, outmoded way of life. Therefore, the widening of the alliance and the achievement of closer cooperation was a difficult and complex task despite the prevailing favourable conditions. The Party of the working class had to exercise circumspection and patience in its political, economic and ideological activity. It necessitated a scientifically elaborated system of measures which would take into account the degree of consciousness of the toiling masses, and also a uniform interpretation and consistent application of these measures.

It is relatively simple to theoretically define the relations between the working class and other classes and strata, though negative examples in this field are also provided by the history of the labour movement. It is much more difficult to define and to elaborate a complex system of measures which in everyday practice would serve the aim of creating unity between the working class and the other toiling classes and strata. Lenin often called attention to the vast discrepancy between the theoretical and the practical solutions to this question. Quoting the example of the great French Revolution he stressed the senselessness of such practical measures which do not reckon with the movement of class forces nor with the expectations and aspirations of the different social classes and strata: "... the French Convention launched into sweeping measures but did not possess the necessary base of support in order to put them into effect, and did not even know on what class to rely in order to put any particular measure into effect."²

Lenin thus clearly indicated that in the course of elaborating measures one has to take into account not only necessary and possible allies, but also – in fact, most of all – that class upon which the Party is based. This has to be all the more stressed because in its policy of alliances the Party will or can commit the greatest errors if it does not correctly analyze its relations with the very class it relies or should rely upon. The differences of opinion and discussions within the international communist and workers' movement are connected to some extent with this problem as well. However, it is theoretically clear to the Marxist-Leninist parties that it is particularly the interest of the working class that have to be followed with special attention and, when possible, satisfied not only during the struggle for political

² Lenin, V. I.: *Selected Works* vol. II, p. 459, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1947.

power, but also in the period of building socialism. The concrete political, social, cultural and other measures, whether these are in regard to the relationship of the Party and the working class or the working class and other classes, may differ and in general have to differ according to country and period, depending on the development of the international and domestic power relations and the accumulation of material goods and cultural values during the building of socialism.

Besides all this one had to take into consideration that in the course of building socialism the change in economic relations was accompanied by the transformation of the social structure. The changes, in terms of the numerical strength and make up of the individual social classes and strata had to be considered. What was perhaps the most important for the elaboration of the policy of alliances was that the composition and interrelationship of the two basic classes, the working class and the peasantry were also subject to significant transformations.

Mainly as a result of the land reform of 1945, the social structure in Hungary changed considerably as early as the first period of the people's democratic development. Though the structure of the population according to main occupations remained almost the same as in 1941, the percentage of workers – including peasants with no more than 0.6 hectares of land – within the whole of the population had decreased from 51 per cent to 37.1 per cent, while the percentage of small-scale farmers increased from 23.1 per cent to 38.6 per cent.³

The class of big landowners had ceased to exist in 1945 and the number of capitalists and other exploiters within the population had been reduced to a minimum by the economic measures taken by the state and especially by the nationalizations in 1948–1949.

Besides the changes in class proportions important changes occurred within the individual classes and strata, too, as well as in their interrelations and their attitude towards the tasks of the revolutionary transformation. This refers first of all to the working class and toiling peasantry, both being protagonists of social development, determining its course and pace.

While the percentage of workers within the population decreased by 13.9 per cent, the percentage of non-agricultural workers, including families, increased between 1941 and 1949 from 26.7 per cent to 27.7 per cent i.e. from 2,486,800 to 2,547,300 – the proportion of industrial and building workers remained static (20 per cent); the number of agricultural workers and peasants with less than 0.6 hectares of land decreased by almost two thirds, that is from 1,790,800 to 600,000, including families.

A no less significant change took place in the composition of small-scale producer peasants. The total number of peasants with 0.6 to 2.9 hectares of land barely increased, the total of peasants with 2.9 to 5.8 hectares almost doubled, while the number of peasants with 5.8 to 14 hectares more than doubled.⁴

³ The part of the population comprised in the category of workers – employed and dependents – was 4,751,000 in 1941 and 3,412,800 in 1949, whereas the number of peasants farming on lands of 0.6 to 14 hectares was 2,154,100 in 1941 and 3,556,500 in 1949.

⁴ The actual figures (including dependents) were: peasants with 0.6 to 2.9 hectares: 1,026,900 in 1941 and 1,060,100 in 1949; peasants with 2.9 to 5.8 hectares: 623,600 in 1941 and 1,228,000 in 1949; peasants with 5.8 to 14 hectares: 503,600 in 1941 and 1,268,200 in 1949.

An examination of the statistical data of the class relations in 1948–1949 discloses the obvious fact that the petty-bourgeois-small-scale peasant character of the country had been strengthened, the proletarian base upon which the party could rely in the villages had been greatly narrowed down. At the same time the working class had become more homogeneous and with the attainment of political power, its political authority and influence upon the further development of the country had increased. This was largely due the spreading of socialist relations of production in industry. By the end of 1948 the socialist sector comprised more than 80 per cent in industry, 91 per cent in mining industry, 95 per cent in banking, 16 per cent in wholesale trade. And by the end of 1949 all these branches became exclusively socialist property.

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As socialist industrialization began, the size of the working class rose rapidly and its composition also changed greatly. From January 1, 1950 to December 31, 1954 the number of industrial workers alone increased by about 300,000, i.e. almost doubled (387,096 in 1949 and 682,108 in 1954). The source of this increase was obviously first of all the rural population. The estimate was that 35 per cent of the 300,000 new industrial workers were recruited from agriculture; 25 per cent from the ranks of the urban population who formerly did not work or from amongst non-industrial workers, first of all women, 10 per cent from declassed elements and the rest from other categories of the population. Within industry the fastest increase was in heavy industry, and at the same time the percentage, compared to the total number of industrial workers, of workers in enterprises employing more than 500 increased from 46 per cent in 1938 to 70 per cent. 45 per cent of the large factories' working force were not workers prior to 1949.

As the working class was, within a short time, enlarged by mostly petty-bourgeois and peasant elements, it temporarily had a negative influence on its ideologico-political physiognomy, cultural standards and professional level. The establishment of proletarian power and the fact that the building of socialism had started, undoubtedly released tremendous energies among the workers. But the tens of thousand of former small peasants who had become "workers", with their way of life and their views strengthened temporarily the influence of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologies on the whole of the working class. The tension thus emerging was further strained by the decrease in the general cultural and professional standards of the working class. This temporary decrease was inevitable as a rapid development of socialist industry implied not only an increase in the number of workers in general but of skilled workers in particular. In order to reclassify and to employ new skilled workers, thousands of semi-skilled workers had to be trained and "quickie" courses had to be organized to give them a minimum of training. Consequently the numerical increase of skilled workers was in disproportion with the average qualification of the industrial workers. All this caused, in addition to the political tension due to the "dilution" of the working class, social tensions as well. Production norms and the rate of increase in productivity could not be determined according to the capacities of the workers officially qualified as skilled labourers but lacking actual training and practice.

In order to overcome the temporary tension caused by the changes in the position, social composition, cultural standards and work skills of the working class it was necessary for the Hungarian Working People's Party (MDP) to do two things; on the one hand it had to engage in active political work, and on the other it had to take social and cultural measures which would lead to the stabilization of the working forces in each factory and also to accelerate the process of training the former peasants, who had become workers, to acquire skills and practice.

As socialist construction began the Party leadership made serious efforts to consolidate workers' power and to increase the socio-political influence of the working class. They endeavoured first of all to oust the exploiters from the central and local organs of power and to replace them, above all, by cadres of worker or peasant origins. There is no doubt that this was politically necessary and served to increase the political authority of the working class. The significance of these measures was, however, diminished by the fact that they were not accompanied by a general upsurge in the political activity of the working class as a whole, although in speeches Party leaders often asserted that it was necessary to rely upon the masses and to promote the political activity of the working class before all else. In practice, however, the labour problem was degraded to one of the administration of the labour force and political work among the workers was reduced to propaganda for stimulating better results in production.

The reason, among others, for the failure to take the necessary steps to solve the above mentioned contradiction, as well as the neglect of political activity in the factories, was that there was no clarity about the functions of the trade unions under the new conditions. Trade-union activity was erroneously limited to the formal organizing of work emulation and its task to promoting the overfulfilment of production targets. When the trade unions attempted to deal with the protection of the workers' interests, these attempts were regarded as avoiding the solution of difficult and unpopular tasks, which the Party leadership saw as an under-estimation of the political maturity of the working class and a trade union break-away from the Party.

This erroneous interpretation of the role of the trade unions was due to fundamentally mistaken social policies. The professed ascetism of the social policies of the party leadership – its origin and characteristics will be analyzed later – preserved and even deepened at the beginning of the 50s the temporary tensions already referred to, which were due to the nature of the development, although as proletarian power was established and the building of socialism started, there was a turn in the relations of the working class and other toiling classes. This was also shown by the land-slide victory of the Popular Front for Independence in May 1949. 95.6 per cent of the votes cast were for the candidates of the Popular Front, which symbolized the strengthened understanding of the toiling classes and strata and the strengthened confidence in the communists and in the socialist future. The Three Year Plan was fulfilled ahead of schedule (December 1949)⁵ and the

⁵ The Three Year Plan (from August 1, 1947 to July 31, 1950) called for a 27.5 per cent increase in industrial production in comparison with 1938 and for agriculture to reach 93 per cent in crop cultivation and 86 per cent in animal husbandry of the 1938–1939 level. At the end of 1949 industry was producing 37 per cent more than in 1938, and in agriculture crop cultivation reached 85 per cent and animal husbandry almost 90 per cent of the pre-war output.

targets of the first year of the Five Year Plan (1950) were overfulfilled.⁶ These facts, especially the latter showed that the attitude of the toiling masses towards work had changed, and this was largely due to the social, health, cultural and other facilities provided by the proletarian state.⁷ These measures inspired justified confidence on the part of the masses since they signified the implementation of the principal laws of socialist progress.

This confidence appeared all the more justified since the speeches and the documents of the Unification Congress of the two workers' parties in June 1948 set the goal of further improving social welfare policies. After three and a half years of difficulties it became finally possible – said Mátyás Rákosi at the congress – to “raise the welfare, economic and cultural standards of the population... to that extent and at such a pace as is expected of a democratic state”.⁸ But a few months later Rákosi and other leaders of the Party had already made declarations not about possibilities of improving the living standard but about the need for austerity and sacrifices.

It would be unrealistic to maintain that the building of socialism does not require great efforts and often sacrifices too, and that in socialism there are no periods of stagnation or even recession in the living standard. Among factors influencing the development of living standards it is sufficient to mention the deterioration in international relations, natural disasters, or the very need to lay down the foundation of a more rapid development. But the declarations quoted above did not refer to this, but, on the contrary, formulated a conception which disregarded the principle of caring for the needs of the people and glorified the Spartan spirit of austerity and sacrifice. Due to the adaptation of this Spartan spirit, the real per capita wages of workers and employees decreased from 1949 to 1952 by 18 per cent and of industrial workers by 16 per cent while national income rose by 50 per cent.⁹

The party leadership tried to compensate for the consequences of the social policies proclaimed in the second half of 1948 by standardizing wages and by occasionally increasing nominal incomes. In itself, the equalizing of wages was

⁶ The Five Year Plan (from January 1, 1950 to December 31, 1954) called for an 86.4 per cent increase in industrial production and a 42 per cent rise in agricultural output. In 1950 industrial production increased by 27 per cent instead of the planned 2.4 while agricultural output increased by 5 to 6 per cent.

⁷ In 1949 real wages were 60 per cent higher than in 1946 and 8 per cent higher than in 1938. The number of people covered by social insurance rose from 2.8 million in 1938 to 3.8 million.

⁸ *A Magyar Kommunista Párt és a Szociáldemokrata Párt egyesülési kongresszusának jegyzőkönyve* (Minutes of the Unification Congress of the Hungarian Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party), p. 104, Szikra, Budapest, 1948.

⁹ This change in social welfare policies inevitably resulted from the distortion of economic policies. The latter was expressed in an extremely striking way by the resolutions of the Second Congress of the MDP held from February 24 to March 2, 1951. The Congress made the following amendments to the original targets of the Five Year Plan: 85 million *forints* had to be allocated for investments instead of the originally planned 50.9 millions; industrial production had to be increased by 210 per cent instead of 86.4 per cent, agricultural output by 54 per cent instead of 42 per cent. The result was that the material resources of the country were consumed by the unrealistic growth of industry, first of all by heavy industry (37.5 million *forints* of the 85 million *forints* devoted to investments were allocated to heavy industry, 3.5 million to light industry and 11 million to agriculture). It became impossible to raise living standards, though an increase of 35 per cent had originally been planned and then even raised to 50 per cent by the Congress.

necessary and correct, since the wage proportions inherited from the counter-revolutionary regime were in fact unjust. But this was done mechanically, by substantially reducing the wages of well paid categories of workers and simultaneously raising the incomes of other categories, while the average real wages of the workers were decreasing instead of increasing. Though in 1953 nominal wages per capita were 63 per cent higher than in 1949, during the same period prices of consumer goods rose by 78 per cent and the price of foodstuffs increased by 119 per cent.

This correction in the wage system had a negative political effect on formerly wellpaid and highly qualified workers, while the general decrease in real wages resulted in the disillusionment of those categories of workers too whose living conditions had relatively and temporarily been improved merely by the equalizing of wages. At the beginning of the 1950s this policy played no small role in the excessive lack of discipline, in the greater turn-over in the labour force, in the abuse of production norms and sick benefits, in thefts, industrial accidents, etc. It is characteristic that in 1955, 46.2 per cent of industrial workers had been employed at their last jobs for up to two years, 26.7 per cent for between two to five years, 14.9 per cent for five to ten years, 7.8 per cent for ten to twenty years and 4.4 per cent for over twenty years. This was obviously also due to the fact that the number of workers had increased most rapidly during the preceding five years. But far more important was the fact that the Party leadership was unable to reduce the particular tensions which arose from the enlargement of the labour force, the classification of semi-skilled workers as skilled ones as well as the employment of young workers who had been trained from 1950 to 1953 but who lacked experience. The leadership failed to create such social and cultural conditions in the factories which could have counter-balanced or even eliminated these tensions.

The constant deterioration of the economic situation of the country and the worsening of living conditions and of the morale of the population in the summer of 1953 forced the Party leadership to revise its political line and practice. The resolution adopted by the Central Leadership at its meeting on June 27–28, 1953 asserted that the Party had committed serious mistakes which had “unfavourably effected the population, and particularly the living standards of the working class, loosened the relations between the Party and the working class, brought about a general deterioration in the relations of the Party and the State on the one hand and the toiling masses on the other and caused grave difficulties in the economy”. It was also pointed out that the Party had followed a sectarian policy which “regarded socialist industrialization as an end in itself”. The Central Leadership stressed that socialist industrialization remained the main intention of the Party, but its pace had to be reduced and the ratio of the development of heavy and light industry had to be changed so as to conform with the main goal; that is to achieve a substantial and constant increase in the living standards of the population and first of all of the working class, as well as the improvement of social and cultural conditions.¹⁰

¹⁰ PI Archives, fond 1/6, unit 3. The Resolution of the Central Leadership of the MDP, June 27–28, 1953.

At its meeting on October 31, 1953 the Central Leadership obligated the Political Committee and urged the Government to work out the measures which would advance the further improvement of the economic, social and cultural conditions of the working class. "All possible economic resources have to be utilized to improve services for the working class, to ensure better working conditions and labour safety, as well as to extend social, cultural and sport facilities in the factories. The wages and working conditions of miners, who perform hard physical labour and are especially important for the national economy and the wages of the lowest paid workers have to be adjusted. Proper proportions have to be established in the wages of the different categories of workers,"¹¹ stated the Political Committee's report.

Due to the steps taken by the government regarding wages, and the reduction of consumer prices together with the better supplying of the population, a gradual improvement in living conditions started as early as in the second half of 1953. As a result the average real per capita wages of workers and employees rose by about 4 per cent as compared to 1949.

But in autumn of 1953 these measures of the party and the government were not unreservedly accepted by the workers. These reservations were not unjustified since the measures had not been preceded by serious calculation, nor were they coordinated. Small wonder then that the result of these insufficiently prepared measures was that work productivity continued to decline, production costs increased and jeopardized the measures intended to improve living conditions.

The situation was even more complicated by the fact that Rákosi's group, in an attempt to conceal the gravity of its secretarian errors, was for many months making unprincipled compromises with the right wing within the Party headed by Imre Nagy, who was appointed Prime Minister in July 1953. Thus it appeared that the leading bodies of the Party and the State were uniformly interpreting the June 1953 resolution of the Central Leadership and that all efforts were being concentrated on correcting the mistakes. From the outset these compromises rendered ineffective the efforts of those forces which were sincerely endeavouring to correct the errors, while favouring the right wing which under the pretext of correcting the errors tried ever more openly to win official recognition for its revisionist policies.

In the spring of 1955 Imre Nagy was removed from his post and Rákosi's group used this to revive their secretarian policy and practice. Neither the masses of non-party people nor the party members themselves could find their bearings in these political turns. Therefore, despite the slow improvement of the economic situation and living conditions, the morale of the working masses deteriorated, enabling the declassed and reactionary elements among the workers' rank and the revisionists gathered around Imre Nagy to extend increasingly their destructive activity.

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The building of socialism that started after 1948, the "Year of the Turning-point" also put the further development of the Party's policy on the peasantry on the agenda. It became necessary to replace the old ideas about how to develop

¹¹ Ibid., fond 1/1, unit 59.

agriculture and about protecting small peasant property with new ones, which would not maintain the status quo, but shape new socialist agrarian relations. Therefore, new factors began to determine the relations between the working class and the peasantry: the demand and the need to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat, to develop the collective farm movement, that is, to carry out the socialist transformation of agriculture.

In elaborating a peasant policy corresponding to the new situation, the Party had to take into account the strengthening of the petty-bourgeois and peasant character of the country as well as the process of equalizing the size of peasant farms which had started with the land reform. This meant that the Party had to thoroughly examine the rural class relations which in the main determine the method and pace of socialist transformation. In his essay entitled "Economy and Politics in the Period of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat", Lenin formulated unequivocally the main line of the rural policies to be followed, asserting that "the proletariat must separate, demarcate the peasant toiler from the peasant owner, the peasant worker from the peasant huckster, the peasant who labours from the peasant who profiteers. In this demarcation lies the *whole essence* of Socialism".¹² In other works, as for instance in his speech delivered at the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party (RC/B/P) and in his writings explaining the need for and the substance of the New Economic Policy, Lenin reiterated that the development of the relations between the working class and peasantry determined the fate of the revolution. He pointed out that in the relations of the two main classes, after the victory of the dictatorship of the proletariat it was of extraordinary importance to win over the middle peasantry to the cause of the revolution and the building of socialism. At the same time he warned that "the relations between the proletariat and the petty-bourgeoisie are a difficult problem, demanding complex measures or, to be more accurate, a whole system of complex transitional measures".¹³

This system of measures is made more complicated by the fact that with the beginning of the building of socialism further changes take place not only in the composition of the working class but also in that of the peasantry. These changes, in terms of their main trend, are related to both the quantitative growth of the working class and the development of the cooperative movement. The latter is obviously more important from the point of view of the Party's peasant policy. It means that the Party has to define correctly its own relations and those of the working class to a new stratum of peasantry representing the future of the rural population. Its policy has to conform with the changes in the composition of the peasantry, a policy which would also satisfy the expectations of the farmers producing on a small scale, but at the same time induce them to accept socialist forms of farming. From the economic point of view this policy has to simultaneously solve the tasks of laying down the foundations of socialism and extending agricultural production in the village.

In 1948-1949 the Central Leadership put the peasant policy to be pursued under the new circumstances on the agenda on several occasions and during the

¹² Lenin, V. I.: op. cit., vol II, p. 532.

¹³ Lenin, V. I.: *Collected Works*, vol. 32, p. 189, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965.

discussion rejected Imre Nagy's right-wing views which under-estimated the capitalist tendencies of small-scale farming and which negated the necessity of the socialist transformation of agriculture. In the "Guidelines for Cooperatives" approved in April 1948, the Party defined correctly the main features of its agrarian policy. "In the peoples' democracy – the "Guidelines" read – possibilities are given for establishing, with the assistance of the State of the working people and relying on the nationalized sector of the economy, such a cooperative system which would drive back capitalist influence and end exploitation in general in our national economy and help develop socialist agriculture by ousting the bourgeoisie from trading, by passing from individual to collective farming in agriculture and by reorganizing agricultural production." "The directives pointed out, as a decisive aspect of the problem, that "we must be accepted not only by the most advanced section of the peasantry, but we must advance towards socialism hand in hand with the whole of the working peasantry ... Therefore when establishing the cooperative system in the people's democracy the main task is to transform the peasant consumers' cooperatives into general rural cooperatives. And as to these general rural cooperatives, the main task is to promote, in all ways, collective organization of production besides giving effective support to marketing and distribution."¹⁴

This political line was expressed during the Unification Congress of the two workers' parties as well as at the National Conference of Cooperatives, held a month later.

The Central Leadership in September 1949 still took a correct theoretical position against Imre Nagy and stressed that the peasant problem had to be examined from the point of view of the rural class struggle and not from that of farming. It had to be examined not abstractly but in connection with the building of socialism in all spheres of society. Imre Nagy's standpoint – the September 3, 1949 resolution of the Central Leadership pointed out – "does not differ from the Party's position because he desires the collectivization of agriculture to take place at a slower pace than does the Party, but rather because the Party seeks the collectivization of agriculture, while Imre Nagy ... seeks to increase the economic power and capacity of the small producers".¹⁵ However, as early as in the second half of 1948, there were symptoms of mistrust toward the peasantry and impatience regarding the socialist reorganization of agriculture and later these became dominant. Despite their differences, the views of Mátyás Rákosi and Imre Nagy coincided on one point.

They both greatly over-estimated the weight and significance of the middle peasantry in Hungary's social and economic life. Imre Nagy, exaggerating the extent of the equalizing of farm sizes, claimed that "the pivotal factor of farming is the middle peasant" who "is a central figure in the village", and therefore "the problem of the middle peasants has become the key issue of our agrarian policies". And so "the agreement with the middle-peasantry has to be stimulated by a resolute policy and by concessions".¹⁶ By exaggerating the extent to which the

¹⁴ *A Magyar Kommunista Párt és a Szociáldemokrata Párt határozatai 1944–1948* (Resolutions of the Hungarian Communist Party and of the Social Democratic Party 1944–1948), pp. 564, 569, 573, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1967.

¹⁵ PI Archives, fond 1/1, unit 43.

peasantry was growing into middle peasants and by proclaiming the need for concessions Imre Nagy stood, in essence, for the freedom of capitalist development in agriculture and on this basis wanted to "consolidate" the alliance with middle-peasantry, while consistently "forgetting" the poor peasants.

Rákosi's supporters also over-estimated the importance and significance of the middle-peasantry, but – in contrast to Imre Nagy – they exaggerated the danger of capitalist tendencies and the predominance of the kulaks. In the struggle against this they put the winning of the middle peasants at the center of party activity in the villages. However, they sought to reach this goal not by making the necessary "concessions" by supporting the output of the individual peasants or by properly reconciling this support with the aim of achieving the socialist transformation of agriculture. Instead they tried to achieve this on the one hand by flattering the middle peasants and on the other by waging a relentless struggle against and terrorizing the kulaks. At best this policy made the middle-peasantry cautious and suspicious, rather than getting them to dissociate themselves from the kulaks. As attention was focused on the middle-peasantry and as winning them over was solely related to the struggle against the kulaks, the result was that essentially the poor peasantry was disregarded by the Rákosi leadership as well and not only from practical considerations and not even always unintentionally.

This obviously does not mean that the task of winning over the middle peasants could not or should not have been put at the centre of the Party's agrarian policies after the beginning of socialist construction. The winning over of the middle-peasantry was indispensable in Hungary for the victory of socialist cooperative farming and thus for an upsurge in agricultural output. Lenin always stressed the importance of this. But, on the one hand, the question of the alliance with the middle-peasantry was not emphasized in Lenin's works and in the agrarian policy of the RC/B/P because of the numerical strength of the middle-peasantry entitled it to be the "central figure of the village", but because the party had substituted the former policy of neutralizing the middle peasantry with a policy of winning them over. In Hungary, where the number of middle farms was only one third of the plots with over 0.6 hectares and totalled 40 per cent of the arable land of the country, the whole problem rather should have been viewed from the latter point of view. On the other hand, when directing the party's attention towards the interests of the middle-peasantry and to the importance of a policy and practice of satisfying these interests in harmony with the building of socialism, Lenin was urging the improvement of the whole Party activity in the villages. Therefore, when underlining the necessity of winning over the middle peasantry, Lenin never forgot the importance of relying on the poor peasants. The opening sentence of the Eighth Congress of the RC/B/P resolution on the relationship to the middle-peasantry also reaffirmed the programme that had been approved, according to which "In its rural activity the RC/B/P will continue to rely upon the proletariat and semi-proletariat of the rural population, organizing them first of all into an independent force by establishing rural party cells, poor-peasant organizations, special types of trade unions for the rural proletariat and semi-proletariat, etc., in

¹⁶ Nagy, I.: *Egy Évtized. Válogatott beszédek és tanulmányok* (Ten Years. Selected Speeches and Essays), vol. 2, pp. 85–86, 123, Szikra, Budapest, 1954.

every way bringing them closer to the urban proletariat and freeing them from being influenced by the interests of the rural bourgeoisie and small-proprietors.

With regard to the kulaks and the rural bourgeoisie, the policy of the RC/B/P is that of resolute struggle against their striving for exploitation, and suppression of their resistance to the Soviet policy."¹⁷

As for the latter, Lenin also warned the party against over-simplification and emphasized that "even in regard to the rich peasants we are not as decisive as we are in regard to the bourgeoisie: we do not demand the absolute expropriation of the rich peasants and the kulaks. This distinction is made in our program. We say that the resistance and the counter-revolutionary efforts of the rich peasant must be suppressed. That is not complete expropriation."¹⁸

But Mátyás Rákosi and his group, which monopolized the party leadership, did not act upon Lenin's advice and also broke with the spirit of the programme-like documents elaborated in the spring and summer of 1948. This was the main cause of the errors in the rural policies and measures of the Party. The consequences of these errors was that not only one or another section of the rural population was hard hit but so was the toiling peasantry as a whole, thus weakening the alliance of the working class and the peasantry. Of the mistakes in the Party's agrarian policy it is necessary to point first of all to the distortion of the system of compulsory delivery¹⁹ which permeated the whole rural activity of the Party. The annual increase of the compulsory delivery norms as well as the low prices resulted in the peasantry becoming disinterested in production. The penalties the peasants had to pay for defaulting in deliveries and the other forms of molestation induced undesirable political reactions among the peasants. The progressive norms of compulsory delivery were a heavy burden of course on the richer peasants too, but their being increased annually struck first of all at the lowest categories of the poor peasantry. Therefore, despite the fact that the delivery system was based on progression, it was precisely the poor peasants or the lower middle peasants who were unable to acquire surplus grains and often, in fact not even the portion allowed primary producers after meeting their delivery obligations remained. Therefore they were hit by the grain prices not only as sellers, but also as buyers; (they received eighty *forints* for two hundred-weight of wheat from the State but had to pay five-hundred *forints* for the same amount on the open market).

A few facts will serve to illustrate the social situation of the poor peasantry. From 1949 to 1953 it was mainly the poor peasants who migrated from the villages to the cities, and this was primarily due to the fact that the agrarian policies of the Party jeopardized production. Nor is it negligible that though the real wages

¹⁷ Az SzKP kongresszusainak, konferenciáinak és központi bizottsági plénumainak határozatai (Resolutions of the Congresses and Conferences of the CPSU and the Plenary Session of its Central Committee), vol. I, p. 495, Szikra, Budapest, 1954.

¹⁸ Lenin, V. I.: *Selected Works*, vol. II, p. 458.

¹⁹ The Party wanted to ensure industry with a supply of agricultural raw materials and the non-agricultural population with foodstuffs by establishing a system of compulsory delivery. Until 1951 this did not include the farms smaller than 2.9 hectares while the delivery norms of the rest were set progressively according to the size of the individual farms. In 1951 only the farms with less than 0.6 hectares of land were exempt from compulsory deliveries while delivery norms were increased to such an extent that especially the smaller peasant farms were left with no surplus, in fact, what remained was often insufficient to maintain their families. At the same time the prices of the produce were set far below production costs.

of workers and employees dropped considerably from 1949 to 1953 while the real income of the peasantry was – with the exception of 1952 when meteorological conditions were bad – higher than in 1949, the living conditions of the peasants were no better than those of the workers and employees. A survey made by the Statistical Office in 1954 showed that the amount of monthly consumption per capita in the first half of 1953 (based on the 1949 purchasing power of the *forint*) was 225 *forints* in workers' and employees' families, while it only reached 207 *forints* in peasants' families.

It is therefore understandable why mainly poor peasants turned from agricultural to industrial occupations, found work at the state farms or joined the cooperatives which were facing serious initial difficulties at the time. These difficulties were further increased by the unrealistic pace of collectivization as well as by their growing indebtedness.²⁰ There were, obviously, reasons for the pioneers of the cooperative movement having been recruited from the ranks of the poor peasantry, and for their subsequently making up the majority of the membership. One part of the village poor who had become farmers rejected the Party's collectivization policy, declaring that they no longer wanted to be anybody's servants. The majority, however, held views that largely coincided with those of the working class, they had confidence in the correctness of the Party's policies and really believed that the only way to a better future was that of socialist collective farming.

This confidence in the correctness of the Party's policy was not unfounded at the beginning of the building of socialism. Though the living conditions of toiling peasantry did not improve in this period, political and cultural life in the villages still had changed considerably because of the numerous achievements of socialist construction. The system of local councils, introduced in 1950, objectively brought about the activation of toiling peasant masses and of their participation in local leadership. The councils, as democratically elected organs of local self-government, proved able, despite the emerging disproportions in Party policy, to involve growing numbers of people in local administration and in controlling the work of its apparatus. As to cultural development, mention has to be made first of all of the electrification of about a thousand villages by the end of 1952, bringing them, in the fullest sense of the word, brightness and light. This was also a period when books, press, cinema and radio veritably conquered the villages. In 1949 there were 685 cinemas in our villages, while in 1952 there were as many as 2,084. The number of radio-subscribers rose from 162,000 in 1949 to 312,000 in 1953. The policy of the workers' and peasants' state with regard to public education, first of all the introduction of the eight grades of comprehensive elementary schooling, served, above all, to eradicate the cultural backwardness of the villages. One of the great revolutionary achievements of this period was that of opening the doors of the secondary schools, colleges and universities to peasant youth. In 1937–1938 only 314 young poor peasants attended secondary schools and only 93 attended colleges or universities. By 1952–1953, 30,600 attended secondary schools and 8,225 were in the colleges and universities.

All this, along with several other changes of historic importance, obviously diminished, though not neutralized, the negative effect of mistakes in the rural policy of the Party. At the beginning of the 50s peasants were not induced any

²⁰ For details see Péter Simon's study in this volume.

more to join cooperatives by their confidence in the Party but under the pressure of the negative consequences of its rural policy. The peasants' small farms were unable to meet the demands of the families and therefore some owners were seeking better living conditions in the cooperative farms. But it cannot be said that better conditions were found in all cases. It is true, however, that the majority of the peasants who had joined the cooperative farms found in them more secure sources of income and were living amidst better circumstances than the majority of the non-cooperative peasants. This was so even though the real amount of the average consumption of cooperative farm families was lower than that of individually farming families.

The over five thousand functioning cooperative farms in 1952, with a membership of 300,000 peasant families, proved unquestionably that conditions were ripe in Hungary for the development of the producers' cooperative movement. The Party was right when, in rejecting Imre Nagy's views, it set the goal of achieving the socialist transformation of agriculture in 1948–1949. This has to be underscored even though one part of the producers' cooperative families were impelled by necessity to accept the new socialist form of farming and not because they were attracted by the cooperatives. This compulsion, the vacillation and political reservations of some of the cooperative members which stemmed from this, the passive attitude towards the affairs and everyday work of the cooperatives made more difficult and delayed the stabilization of the cooperative farms.

This was also influenced by the originally already small investment sums allocated to agriculture which were later even reduced. The investments intended for agriculture were not only in disproportion to the demand of increasing agricultural production by over 50 per cent as laid down by the Five Year Plan, but was also far from sufficient to meet the needs arising from the cooperative movements' numerical rate of growth. The taxation policy, along with the system of compulsory delivery also made it impossible for the cooperatives to develop their farms from their own resources. Thus, the cooperatives were sinking deeper into debt so that state support delayed their economic stabilization rather than accelerated it.

The June 1953 resolution of the Central Leadership envisaged the elaboration and application of new political directives with regard to the peasant question as well, emphasizing, however, that the producers' cooperatives continued to be the road to be followed in the building of socialism in the villages. The Central Leadership decided to contain the numerical growth of the cooperative movement and to consolidate the existing collective farms, at the same time fully supporting the individually working peasants so as to stimulate production.

However, the new line introduced by this resolution took a bad turn as early as July 4, when Prime Minister Imre Nagy made his policy speech in Parliament. Imre Nagy interpreted the most important provisions of the unpublished resolution in his own way and promised government action accordingly. In his speech he declared that "the government intends to guarantee by all means the security of peasant production and property", and thus essentially reiterated the views he held in 1948–1949. True, he also said that "the government will continue to give far-reaching support to the producers' cooperative farms" because "this is the best way toward progress in the villages". This, however, radically differed from what the resolution had contained. The June resolution stated that "the producers

cooperatives continue to be the road to be followed in the building of socialism in the villages", while according to Imre Nagy it was only one of the roads, though the best one. Therefore, there were other possible roads too, namely, that of supporting and developing private farms, guaranteeing property rights, which "is regarded by the government as its primary task".²¹

The resolution proposed that the peasants who were not as yet firmly established in the cooperatives be allowed to withdraw at the end of the fiscal year and that cooperatives may be dissolved at the request of the majority of the members. The implementation of this proposal was a precondition not only to the correction of the errors committed during the organization of the cooperative farm movement, not only to the stabilization of the cooperatives, but also to the numerical extension of the movement in the future. But the idea that peasant property was to be "guaranteed by all means", gave a different interpretation to the proposal of the Central Leadership taking the adherents of the cooperative movement by surprise and actually encouraged a part of the membership to urge the dissolution of the cooperatives. The kulaks also found encouragement in Imre Nagy's speech, and demanded the return of the land they had previously offered to and which was being worked by the cooperatives.

On July 11, 1953, at the conference of Budapest party activists, Rákosi made an attempt to counter-balance the effect of Imre Nagy's speech, but the whole of Imre Nagy's right-wing concepts were not rejected. Moreover, creating the impression that the party leadership was united, Rákosi himself also gave scope to the spreading of right-wing ideas. At the meeting of the Central Leadership on October 31, 1953, speaking about the implementation of the June resolution, Rákosi spoke without reservation about the support "by all means" to private farms, although the events had already pinpointed the dangers inherent in the concealment of differences.²² Following the confusion and discontent spread by Imre Nagy, more than 500 cooperative farms were dissolved in two months (October and November), the number of cooperative peasant families decreased by 90,000, membership dropped by 120,000, and this trend continued in 1954 as well. According to the Central Statistical Office the amount of the per capita monthly consumption by peasants increased significantly as a result of the measures taken by the State following the June resolution. But the report of the Statistical Office also called attention to the fact that "since the proclamation of the government's programme, the measures aimed at increasing the living standards of the working peasants mostly increased the real incomes of the more well-to-do middle peasants, and to a lesser degree of the poor peasants".²³

Thus Imre Nagy's rightist views began to make their influence felt in practice as well shortly after the proclamation of the government's programme. The Rákosi concept and consequences regarding the growth of middle peasantry in the villages were replaced by Imre Nagy's, which had their own consequences. The correction of the errors committed prior to July 1953 was from the beginning permeated by Imre Nagy with new mistakes and new distortions, which – as the examples quoted above have shown – prevented the correction of some errors and

²¹ Imre Nagy, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 357–358.

²² PI Archives, fond 1/1, unit 59.

²³ *Ibid.*, fond 1/2, unit 335.

hindered the implementation of the decision to rely on the poor peasantry and the membership of the cooperative farms.

Therefore the question rightfully arises: why did not Rákosi and his group reject the right-wing distortion of the resolution of the Central Leadership? Perhaps because they knew they were responsible for the errors committed before 1953 and therefore felt that they had lost the right to intervene? Or perhaps they became disoriented and did not recognize that Imre Nagy was reviving the ideas he had professed in 1948–1949 and had then withdrawn after having been criticized by the Central Leadership? The events that followed proved that this was not the case. At the meeting of the Central Leadership in March 1956, Rákosi was still evading the issue by claiming that they had not been aware of what was happening, but Ernő Gerő, a member of the Political Committee and the leading personality of the economic policies of the time, interrupted: "We were aware of it and told him so (Imre Nagy – A.Zs.) too, but still, we tolerated it."²⁴

Recognized, but tolerated it. They tolerated it because, though the adoption of the June 1953 resolution was made imperative by the situation, neither Rákosi nor Gerő believed it to be correct. Therefore, expecting the new policy to fail, they let things slide, so that under the pretext of the difficulties that would be caused by the new errors they could justify the pre-1953 policies and practice. And in the spring of 1955, when they judged conditions ripe to openly oppose Imre Nagy's revisionist policies, they basically revived the pre-1953 agrarian policy. A year before Rákosi himself had stressed that the output of the private farms would for a long time... be indispensable and of decisive importance,²⁵ but in March 1955 he characterized support for private farms as a turn towards capitalism. "If we don't stop and don't turn back from the road which leads agriculture not towards socialism, but in the opposite direction, we are undermining the foundations of the people's democracy",²⁶ he said.

All of this would, of course, be very well had it only involved a struggle against Imre Nagy's rightist views, against others becoming kulaks and against attempts to ally kulaks and middle peasants. But in reality they once again counterposed the development of private farms against the socialist transformation of agriculture and claimed that the Party's rural policy had been also fundamentally correct before 1953. It was not by chance that resolutions once again laid down the number of co-ops to be formed and the extent to which the membership of the cooperatives had to be increased, which meant in many cases violations of the principle of voluntary association, frequent molestation of the peasants and the use of force. It is true that spectacular disciplinary measures were initiated by the Rákosi clique against some of those guilty of such practices in order to give the impression of strictly guarding the principle of voluntary association. This, however, only served to conceal the weaknesses of the Party's peasant policy by blaming certain organizations and individuals.

The agrarian policy of the Rákosi leadership before 1953, the post 1953 promotion of Imre Nagy and the toleration of his views, then, after 1954, the at-

²⁴ Ibid., fond 1/1, unit 70.

²⁵ Ibid., fond 1/2, unit 8.

²⁶ Ibid., fond 1/1, unit 9.

tempt to restore the old agrarian policy, all separately and collectively adversely affected the relationship of workers and peasants and the alliance between the working class and peasantry.

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Though from the point of view of social progress and socialist development the decisive factor is the situation and mutual relationship of workers and peasants, the Party cannot be indifferent as to how the situation of other strata and groups of the population is developing. The attitude of these groups towards the socialist system, towards the tasks of building socialism is of great importance, and the Party has to know what policy to pursue so that these groups and strata should strengthen the social base of socialism. It is impossible within the confines of this study to analyze in detail the opinion of Rákosi's group about the social position of these strata and groups and their role in the building of socialism. Therefore as we shall try to indicate the most important factors in the development of their situation and to summarize the policies of Rákosi's group toward these groups.

In regard to social structure, it has to be pointed out that from 1949 to 1955 the majority of the non-agricultural small producers joined artisan cooperatives or found employment in state industry, while a number of industrial workers went over to the cooperatives. (About 50 per cent of the members of the artisan cooperatives were not originally artisans.) The number of independent artisans decreased from 187,087 in 1949 to 96,567 in 1955, while the artisan cooperatives' membership grew from 13,437 to 113,808.²⁷

The numerical increase of the intelligentsia and their distribution according to class origins is shown by the following figures, which, though they do not completely reflect, nevertheless do summarize the proportions and nature of the trend. Enrollment in higher schools of education in 1937–1938 was 11,747, in 1949–1950 the number rose to 23,247 and in 1955–1956 to 45,431. From 1938 to 1955 the number of engineers increased from 11,409 to 19,200, that of physicians from 10,590 to 14,153 and of teachers from thirty to sixty thousand. Before the Liberation, young people of worker and peasant origins made up only 3 to 4 per cent of university students, while by 1955–56 this rose to 50 per cent. They totalled as little as 21 per cent of the graduates of the Technical University in 1953, and as much as 60 per cent in 1954.²⁸ These structural changes were, on the one hand, the achievements or consequences of a definite policy and, on the other hand, they necessitated a well-defined policy which would take these changes into account. The policies of the Rákosi leadership not only weakened the ties between the working class and the Party but the alliance of the working class and peasantry as well and also failed to draw other social groups closer to socialism. The numerical growth of the intelligentsia and particularly the considerable suc-

²⁷ *Statistikai Évkönyv, 1949–1955* (Statistical Yearbook, 1949–1955), pp. 127–129, Budapest, 1957.

²⁸ PI Archives, fond 1/6, unit 3; *Statistikai Évkönyv 1949–1955* (Statistical Yearbook, 1949–1955), pp. 305, 327; Köpeczi, B.: *A kulturális forradalom húsz esztendeje. Húsz év. Tanulmányok a szocialista Magyarország történetéből* (Twenty Years of Cultural Revolution. Twenty Years. Essays on the History of Socialist Hungary), p. 274, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1964.

cess of the efforts to include in its ranks young people of worker and peasant origin could not compensate for the harm engendered by the mistrust of intellectuals. This lack of confidence – along with other mistakes burdening the policies of the Party – shook the faith in socialism of the part of the intelligentsia which was most willing and able to create. As for the consequences of the attempt to liquidate private small-scale industry, these increased the contradictions which had already adversely influenced the alliance between the working class and peasantry.

The rapid decrease in the number of artisans created problems first of all in the villages as made it more difficult to repair the equipment of the farms and hindered the development of other services as well. Though the number of small artisan cooperatives increased substantially from 1949 to 1953, this could not compensate for the uncertainty arising from the restrictions on private small-scale industry for two reasons. The first, that the artisan cooperatives were formed only in large villages, mainly in district centres, and the second because they were primarily working for the state rather than doing repairs and providing the services they formerly performed. Finally, the many restrictions to which private small-scale industries were subjected, and then the attempt to quickly liquidate them had the political result of alienating quite large sections of the city and village populations.

The class situation of certain groups of the former exploiters and their lackeys, which numbered 200,000 people, greatly differed. There is no doubt, however, that this stratum was potentially the social base of counter-revolution, that is, the main source which the enemies of socialism could draw upon. Therefore, one of the most important tasks of the proletarian state is to make it impossible for these strata to form counter-revolutionary groups and to attack socialism, as well as relentlessly suppress the elements or groups pursuing anti-socialist activities. At the same time the dictatorship of the proletariat has to ensure normal living conditions to that part of the expropriated sector which is ready to work after having been divested of their property, tries to adjust to the new conditions, to find their place in the society of working people and loyally accepts and respects the measures taken by the proletarian state. Moreover, when ensuring the possibility of integration into the new social system the Party and the State have to aim at enlarging the circle of those groups of the former exploiters which is loyal to the regime so as to narrow-down the social base of counter-revolution. But during the period under discussion the Party's policies were characterized by serious errors and shortcomings in this respect as well.

We have dealt with this problem in the section dealing with the rural question, or more precisely the socialist transformation of agriculture. Therefore here we only wish to call attention to the conceptions upon which the Party based its policy toward the kulaks and which actually confused the class-viewpoint with judgement of individual personalities. Rákosi pointed out that the absolute distrust of the individual kulak was inherent in the struggle against the kulaks, excluding in advance those who would have been loyal and the possibility of reeducation of at least some of them. "The social function of the kulaks... the fact that the kulaks are exploiters, longing for a return of the past, that they are rural allies and representatives of the urban capitalists..." cannot be ignored, Rákosi told a meeting

of the Central Leadership on May 31, 1949. "Irrespective of whether the individual kulak is good or bad, we must fight vigorously."²⁹

This distorted class analysis did not lead to the distortion of the policies regarding the class enemy, but extended to the workers and the peasants and the whole policy of alliances. And this way of thinking stemmed from one main source, the dogmatic interpretation of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

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The basic requirement of the dictatorship of the proletariat is the implementation of the leading role of the revolutionary, Marxist-Leninist party of the working class, the consistent implementation of the policy of the building of socialism. This, however, does not at all exclude the possibility of several parties functioning amid the conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat, even such parties, which do not always identify themselves with the endeavours of the communist party, but are not enemies of socialism and support at least those measures which coincide with the direct interests of the masses they represent. According to the Marxist-Leninist theory of the state, the multi-party system is not a criterion or precondition of the dictatorship of the proletariat, just as the one-party system is not. For theoretical or political reasons the socialist state may limit the activity of democratic parties, it may dissolve them and "form" new uninfluential ones. This, however, can hardly promote the cause of socialism. Historical experience proves that a multi- or one-party system under the dictatorship of the proletariat objectively depends on the traditions and the political reality of the nation.³⁰

In the case of a multi-party system the alliance of the classes is embodied in the alliance of the parties, though all the parties try to win over directly all the possible allies of the classes they represent. The cooperation of the different parties depends, of course, on the interests of the classes they represent, which also determines the forms of this cooperation. During the years of World War II and later on in the people's democracies the most widespread forms of this cooperation were the different variants of the people's front. The popular front, especially during the building of socialism, need not inevitably exist only as an alliance of different parties. Even in the event of a multi-party system it is not merely a means of cooperation of the parties and the coordination of the social classes and strata they represent, but also a common organization or movement of party members and non-party-people belonging to the same class. In Hungary the popular front movement developed rather as a cooperation of the parties and the classes they represented, and sometimes they were in conflict with one another. The Hungarian National Independence Front was, from the beginning, encumbered by

²⁹ *Szabad Nép*, June 1, 1949.

³⁰ In some countries of Eastern and Southern Europe several parties took part in the people's democratic revolutions after World War II. The cooperation of these parties did not run a smooth course, on the contrary, the situation at times became critical. Yet the existence of a multi-party dictatorship of the proletariat was nonetheless a political reality in these countries. The representatives of the Yugoslav Communist Party were therefore wrong, when at the International Conference of the communist parties in Poland in 1947, they criticized, on the basis of their own experiences, the coalition policies of other parties and underestimated the political significance of the democratic partners of these parties.

contradictions. It became a loose government coalition as a result of the divergent aspirations of the parties involved and by their different views about the democratic transformation. The coalition itself was more an arena of party struggles than an organization for the collaboration of the democratic forces.³¹

The shift in power that occurred in 1947–1948; the swing to the left that started within the coalition and especially in the Smallholders' Party, which was the right wing of the coalition, as well as the preparation for the unification of the two workers' parties and then the unification itself brought about new conditions for the cooperation of the coalition parties. As the building of socialism became an actuality the earlier programme and forms of collaboration of the national forces became obsolete. This necessitated giving new content and form to the popular front movement. The resolute swing to the left that had begun in the Independent Smallholders' Party and in the National Peasant Party made this possible.

József Révai, member of the Political Committee and the main theoretician of the Party, said that the unity of power and government, essential to socialist progress, was compatible with a multi-party system, adding the following reservations: 1. that the representatives of the exploiting classes be ousted from the allied parties and their influence eliminated; 2. that inter-party squabbles be substituted by joint activity and the role of the working class strengthened. József Révai stressed these reservations as generally valid principles. As for the concrete situation in Hungary, his estimation was that conditions were ripe for the unity of power and government essential for the advance towards socialism. "Experience shows", he said "that the former, discordant coalition has been replaced by one which promotes the political unity of government rather than impeding it." The main guarantee of this unity was to be the new Independence Front from which the representatives of the bourgeoisie would be ousted. Its base and backbone would be the working class and toiling peasantry, firmly led by the working class.³²

Thus, as early as at the beginning of 1948, the Party began to propagate the need to transform the Independence Front. It began to lay the ideological and political ground for extending the popular front movement on the basis of a new programme and for the consolidation of the coalition parties' united front.

The practical preparation for the formation of the Popular Front began in the autumn of 1948. At a representative meeting of the Hungarian Working People's Party, the Independent Smallholders' Party, the National Peasant Party and the trade unions on September 10, a committee was named to prepare a draft programme for the popular front and to negotiate with the parties and organizations willing to take part in the popular front movement. A draft declaration was prepared by the middle of January 1949, and on February 1, the conference of the representatives of the three political parties and of the trade unions, youth and women's organizations proclaimed the formation of the Hungarian Popular Front for Independence and elected a provisional National Council. On March 15 the first Congress of the Hungarian Front for Independence confirmed the resolution

³¹ See Ágnes Ságvári's study in this volume.

³² József Révai's report to the national educational conference of the MDP. *Szabad Nép*, September 26, 1948.

of the February meeting and elected an 81 member National Council and an 11 member Presidium.

On the surface, therefore, it appeared as if the rights of the democratic parties had been given due regard and that the events were carried through in the spirit of broad popular and national unity. In reality, however, this was only a surface appearance. At the turn of the year 1948–1949 various contradictory opinions were often being voiced at closed meetings. These concerned the democratic parties' right to existence and the role and significance of the Popular Front and clearly demonstrated the shift that had already taken place in the popular front policy of the MDP as early as the end of 1948. This change was first manifested at the meeting of the Central Leadership on November 27, 1948, where, contrary to his previous views, Rákosi already stressed not the democratization and the readiness to cooperate of the Smallholders' Party, but rather its duplicity and dangerousness. And at the March 5, 1949 meeting of the same body, shortly before the convocation of the Popular Front Congress, the idea that the mere existence of the democratic parties constituted a constant reserve for the enemy was clearly formulated. According to this, these parties separated the working class from its allies rather than linking them, and therefore their existence did more harm than good to democracy. The Popular Front was therefore to be considered as a means for achieving the withering away of the other parties rather than an organization for coordinating the activity of the democratic parties.³³

It seems logical to link Rákosi's interpretation of the popular front policy to what caused the break in Party policy, including the policy of alliances and the attitude towards the Popular Front as well, which began in the second half of 1948 and subsequently led to the distortion of the whole policy and activity of the Party. We think that it would be too general to seek the causes in the mistakes of the personality cult. If we would seek the reasons for the mistakes in the erroneous evaluation of the power relations and first of all of the international situation, in the overestimation of the danger of war and in the differences which emerged in 1948–1949 within the international communist movement, then we are closer to the more concrete sources. But this does not include all, nor even the most important causes. We believe that the decisive role in the distortion of the generally correct line established at the turn of the 1947–1948 year was played by the dogmatic conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the counterposing of this to the popular democratic road toward the transition to socialism.

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Before analyzing the views held after the second half of 1948 on the dictatorship of the proletariat and the effect this had on the Party's policies, it is necessary to outline briefly their backgrounds. In 1944–1945, at the beginning of the democratic transformation, the Party leadership did not discuss whether the revolutionary transformation taking place under new conditions would enrich with new features the experiences of building the state and of the exercise of power

³³ PI Archives, fond 1/1, unit 39.

under the dictatorship of the proletariat. The question arose in a new way in the middle of 1946 when the course of revolutionary development and the nature of the people's state had to be defined. At this time, conferring with some leaders of the individual communist parties, Stalin said that the people's democracies could attain socialism in a special way which "need not necessarily follow the Soviet system and the dictatorship of the proletariat".³⁴ This opinion predominated and was reflected in the position taken at the Third Congress of the MKP. Rákosi said in November 1947: "After the First World War the communists thought that the path to socialism was identical with that along which the Soviet Union was progressing. But after the defeat of fascism, the advance of the people's democratic forces in a number of countries brought about such changes which make it probable that the development in these countries will lead to a transition into socialism." (Authors's emphasis.)³⁵

The supposition of a contradiction between the people's democratic road to socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat already in 1946 stemmed from this dogmatic view that the social base and exercise of the functions of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the mechanism of the structure of its organs of power had to be everywhere and always exactly identical to the Soviet model, irrespective of the changed international power relationships and the situation within the individual countries. Therefore the alleged contradiction was solved in 1946 by choosing the road of people's democratic development and denying the necessity of proletarian dictatorship. This theoretical error had, temporarily, a positive effect on the policies and practice of the Party because it forced the Party leadership to work out an independent policy taking into consideration Hungarian reality.

This attitude was reappraised in the summer of 1948 mainly because of the resolution condemning the activity of the Yugoslav Communist Party, taken in the summer of 1948 by the Bureau of Information of the Communist Parties (Cominform), which was founded in September 1947. Though the 1948 meeting of the Bureau of Information apparently only criticized the errors committed by the leaders of the Yugoslav Communist Party with regard to certain concrete issues, the resolution, however, meant a revising of the views on the contradiction between the people's democratic road to socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The belief continued that people's democratic development was in contradiction with the dictatorship of the proletariat, but this alleged contradiction was now considered solvable by questioning the possibility of a people's democratic road to socialism instead of the necessity for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

József Révai was the first to assert at the National Educational Conference of the MDP in September 1948 that in Hungary the dictatorship of the proletariat had been established. Though avoiding the expression "dictatorship of the proletariat" when analyzing the functions of our state, Révai stressed that the people's democratic state "belongs historically to the type of State characterizing the

³⁴ Gottwald, K.: Report to the Meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia on September 25-26, 1946. Quoted by Jaroslav Opat: "K metodě studia a výkladu některých problémů v období 1945-1948." *Príspevky k dejinám*, No. 1, 1965.

³⁵ PI Archives, fond 720, VII-14.

transition from capitalism to socialism and is of the same nature".³⁶ At the end of 1948, Ernő Gerő, Mátyás Rákosi and József Révai, in memoranda to the members of the Political Committee declared unequivocally that our state was a state of the dictatorship of the proletariat.³⁷ These ideas were summarized by Mátyás Rákosi, in an article in the paper *Szabad Nép*, and later on his statement was confirmed by the Central Leadership, which summarized the various views and added that the people's democracy was a dictatorship of the proletariat without the soviets. It has to be noted here, however, that this formula did not mean the recognition of the special features inherent in people's democratic development, but reflected the opinion that the dictatorship of the proletariat was not yet perfect in our country, that is, the differences were due to the fact that in Hungary the dictatorship of the proletariat "still wears the features of its origins, the remnants of the transition from the phase of bourgeois democratic transformation" and therefore "it has to approximate the Soviet type of the dictatorship of the proletariat".³⁸ This, in other words, also meant that once we had a dictatorship of the proletariat – even though not the same as that of the 1920s and 1930s in the Soviet Union, – it had to follow the Soviet example as did the whole practice of building socialism.

The new interpretation of the necessity for a dictatorship of the proletariat and the absolutism of the Soviet model chronologically coincided with the beginning of the Party's distorted policy. This process, during which as a result of the dogmatic conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Rákosi's group changed from a realistic political policy to a servile imitation of the experiences of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, began as early as the second half of 1948. We have already referred to some aspects of its consequences and therefore we only intend here to illustrate briefly the effect of this conception on the popular front policy of the Party.

As a result of the dogmatic interpretation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leaders of the Party did not take into account the development of the political conditions of building of socialism and overstressed, as early as autumn 1948, the oppressive role of the state. Evaluating the 1949 elections, Rákosi pointed out that "one of the functions of the dictatorship of the proletariat is to crush the legal political organizations of the still existing classes".³⁹ He obviously meant the democratic parties. But it was not possible to crush them by administrative measures because of the vast mass support they enjoyed. An effective means was provided by such a transformation of the Popular Front for Independence which made it impossible for these parties to act independently and thereby, as was said at the time, helped in the given situation to rid the dictatorship of the proletariat of all bourgeois democratic remnants. This was, in a word, the "historic" mission of the Hungarian Popular Front for Independence. Those who think that the Popular Front will have a long life, said Rákosi in March 1949, are very much mistaken. "This Popular Front is, as a matter of fact, one phase in the process of the wither-

³⁶ *Szabad Nép*, September 26, 1948.

³⁷ PI Archives, fond 720, VII-75.

³⁸ Révai, J.: *Élmi tudunk a szabadsággal* (We Were Able to Make Use of Freedom), p. 517, Szikra, Budapest, 1949.

³⁹ PI Archives, fond 1/1, unit 41.

ing away of the other parties, and perhaps the last one", he said, adding that "we feel that not much will come of this popular-front policy".⁴⁰

Thus, the way in which the Popular Front was formed, the rights to which it was formally entitled and the relationship which was established between the Party and the Front becomes comprehensible. It is understandable that despite the frequent assertions of the Party's leading role and its pathological anxiety, the jurisdiction of the Popular Front was designated as the participation in the administration and guidance of the peoples' democratic Hungary and was defined as an organization of democratic forces, the members of which have to completely submit themselves to the decisions of the National Council and execute its decisions. All this was meant to prevent the so-called "other" parties from pursuing any independent activity, since the starting point had always been for the artificial withering away of the Popular Front itself in the shortest possible time. That is why the Popular Front from its inception had merely the formal role of preparing and conducting the elections. And all this did not occur as a result of some kind of spontaneous and slow eclipsing of the Popular Front, nor of the obscurity of its goals as Rákosi's group later claimed in an attempt to avoid responsibility for what had happened.

The meeting of the Central Leadership of the MDP in June 1953 did not analyze the issue on its merits. This only occurred in 1954, after the Third Congress of the Party. However, the reorganization of the Popular Front and the correction of the leftist mistakes occurred under the influence of Imre Nagy's rightist distortions. The leading organs of the Party indicated correctly, during the preparations, that the reorganization of the Popular Front could not be accompanied by the revival of the former democratic parties, and therefore the Popular Front could neither be a coalition, nor a mass organization, but a broad socio-political mass movement based on democratic principles. The leading role of the Party within the Front was not to be ensured by the numerical dominance of Party members in the committees of the Front, but by their political activity. As for the political content of the movement only the tasks of cultivating patriotism and of progressive bourgeois traditions were emphasized, while there was a discreet silence about the socialist goals of popular and national collaboration. Thus the idea of national collaboration that should have been embodied in the new Popular Front was given a nationalist interpretation, feeding illusions of class peace. This was the ideological source of the spread of such ideas that the task of the Popular Front was to counterbalance the radical, socialist policies of the Party with a more liberal policy.

In 1955 the right-wing distortions apparent in the policy of the Popular Front were also condemned, so that consideration of the development of the Popular Front movement was not on the agenda until the spring of 1956, which nurtured the spread of right-wing ideas in the movement, strengthening, at the same time, the mistrust of some communists towards the Popular Front movement.

After the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the leading bodies of the Party began to reexamine the question, but they focused their attention first of all on organizational problems, more precisely, on the kind of organizations to incorporate into the Popular Front so as to strengthen the

⁴⁰ Ibid.; fond 1/1, unit 39.

Party's influence. This formalistic approach to the problem, however, was not and could not be successful, as the negative tendencies emerging within the movement were not due to inherent causes, but to the contradictions arising from Party's policy as a whole.

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It becomes clear, even from this brief outline of the policy of alliances, that as a result of the dogmatic conceptions and sectarian practice that had been established in the atmosphere of the personality cult, Rákosi's group did not simply err in individual questions but distorted the Party's policy as a whole. They did not take into account the particular possibilities and requirements inherent in the changed international power relations and in Hungary's internal relationships.

Returning to the starting point of our survey, that is, that the policy of alliances is not an abstract conception, it cannot be separated from the main political line, from the strategic goals and the whole practical activity of the Party, the question arises: how shall we judge the main political line and the strategic goals of the MDP? We believe that no further proof is needed to show that the policy of the MDP was to build socialism. This is unquestionable in the establishment of workers' power, in the establishment of socialist production relations in industry and the development of socialist industry, the spreading of the idea of cooperation in the villages and the consolidation of collective farms, in the abolition of the exploitation and the insecurity of toiling masses, the development and results of the cultural revolution, etc. It is true that this policy was filled with distortions, which were not mistakes arising in the course of constructive work, which could have been made by anyone, but the result of erroneous conceptions. These conceptions, as we have already stated, can be summarized in the fact that Rákosi's group conceived schematically not only the general laws of the building of socialism, but also servilely imitated the Soviet Union's particular methods of putting into effect the laws of development, which, because of the cult of the personality, proved to be wrong in the Soviet Union too. "There was a period in the years following the achievement of the dictatorship of the proletariat", wrote János Kádár, "when the leading group of the Hungarian communists did not sufficiently understand and could not concretely apply Lenin's teaching according to which 'the unity of international tactics of the communist working-class movement of all countries demands, not the elimination of variety, not the abolition of national differences ... , but such an application of the *fundamental* principles of communism, ... as will *correctly modify* these principles in *certain particulars*, correctly adapt and apply them to national and national state differences.'⁴¹ Because of these kinds of errors, the general laws of building socialism were obviously also not correctly applied to Hungarian reality".⁴²

The distortions emerging before 1956 in the building of socialism also effected in a certain way and to a certain degree the main political line of the Party as well.

⁴¹ Lenin, V. I.: *Selected Works*, vol. II, p. 626.

⁴² Kádár, J.: *A szocializmus teljes győzelméért* (For the Complete Victory of Socialism), p. 180, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1962.

This, however, "does not at all change the fact that socialism was being built in our country even before 1956 under the leadership of the Hungarian Workers' Party".⁴³ Moreover, it has to be kept in mind that in 1947-1948 the Party began the elaboration and the implementation of the directives for the building of socialism in a correct way, in harmony with the requirements of the objective conditions.

The distortion of the political line began in the second half of 1948, when it was believed that the supposed contradiction between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the people's democratic road to socialism could be eliminated in the way mentioned above. Following that, Rákosi's group violated ever more rudely the previously avowed principles of economic and social policy and broke with the political practice of the years immediately following the liberation, which, despite some mistakes, fundamentally took realities into account. They did not study the development of power relations nor did they work out such a system of practical measures which could have strengthened the unity of the working class, enhanced its influence in society, compensated for and if possible solved the contradictions which were inherent in national unity. Rákosi's leadership increasingly failed to take into account the real situation and especially left out of consideration the needs of the people who were building socialism. In 1948-1949, the conception and practical requirements which proclaimed austerity and regarded the building of socialism as an end in itself, had a direct impact on the attitude of the various classes, weakened the confidence of the masses in the Party, and deepened the developing contradictions inherent in national-popular unity. All this further aggravated the atmosphere of general mistrust, the feverish search for enemies and the neglect of democracy in Party and State life. Consequently, the objective broadening of the social base of socialism, resulting from the changes in class structure, was not exploited.

Though the June 1953 resolution of the Central Leadership had not been preceded by a thorough analysis of the situation and a careful elaboration of a whole system of essential measures, it could have been the basis of a subsequent survey of and the correction of errors. But the June resolution, however, mainly for lack of able politicians, was not implemented. The measures did temporarily reduce political tension, but, despite a slow progress in the economy and welfare, the political situation was further aggravated, discontent was further increased within and outside of the Party by a whole series of superficial and contradictory measures, by the confusion and hesitation caused by Imre Nagy's rightist policies, as well as by the revival of the leftist sectarian policies in 1956.

In July 1956 steps were taken again by the Central Leadership of the Party to correct the mistakes, war was declared on the right wing and left-wing deviations. With the removal of Mátyás Rákosi in June the Central Leadership eliminated one of the main barriers to the correction of the mistakes. But only one, because Ernő Gerő, who was elected First Secretary by the Central Leadership, as the one responsible for economic policy was therefore not any less guilty for the failure to carry out the resolution of June 1953. It was therefore not by chance that he failed to analyze the mistakes in his speech at the July 1956 Central Leadership meeting. In fact, he said he was not going to open up old wounds.

⁴³ Op. cit., p. 37.

Thus, from 1949 to 1956 the Party leadership, despite the attempts made in June 1953 and July 1956, was not able to solve correctly, even from a theoretical point of view, the problems related to the policy of alliance. It was even less capable of elaborating a system of practical measures to develop properly the relations between the Party and the working class as well as between the working class and other classes in conformity with the interests of socialism.

This uncertainty, the failure of the attempts made in June 1953 and July 1956, the various interpretations given to the resolutions of the Central Leadership and the postponement of their implementation undermined the authority of the Party, paralysed the forces of socialism and encouraged the domestic revisionist organizers of the counter-revolution. International imperialist reaction ever more openly helped in the ideological, tactical and organizational preparation of the counter-revolution. The leaders of the Party, headed at the time by Ernő Gerő, were unable to arrest the counter-revolutionary process jeopardizing socialism and the future of the whole Hungarian people. Political deviation had to be eliminated and the errors committed had to be corrected by the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, reorganizing itself in the storm of the struggle against the counter-revolutionary uprising.

The Socialist Reorganization of Agriculture in Hungary

by

Péter Simon

The socialist transformation of the village and agriculture is an essential part of a socialist revolution. In Hungary, the socialist reorganization of agriculture took a decade and a half, counting from when the first socialist type cooperative farms were formed in 1948 to the completion of the reorganization in 1962. If, however, we wish to be more precise and consider the 1945 land reform and the agricultural cooperative movement, which developed from it as the preparation for the socialist transformation of agriculture, which these reforms truly were, and if we bear in mind that with the completion of the reorganization in 1962 the socialist transformation of agriculture was only partly achieved, then we must conclude that this great revolution of the Hungarian village took over a quarter of a century.

As to the reasons for this, the answer must be sought in the situation and historical circumstances of the country.

Prior to the Liberation, Hungary was an agricultural country with a developing industry. In 1935¹ its agricultural and forestry area came to 9.24 million hectares, (1 h = 2.471 acres), of which 7.55 million hectares were agricultural. Agricultural ownership and property relations as well as agricultural working conditions had retained many of the feudal features of the past, despite the fact that since the liberation of the serfs during the 1848 revolution, capitalist conditions prevailed in Hungarian agriculture too. Of the total area 48.1 per cent was farmed in units larger than 57.5 hectares, most of which were left over from feudal times. Twenty-seven per cent of the total area of the country, and 20 per cent of the agricultural area — the majority of the large estates — were entailed, that is, could not be sold. Sixty to 70 per cent of the wages of the agricultural labourers, who were on annual contract, were paid in kind and a large part of the earnings of the other agricultural workers were also in kind, for their various shares in work. Payment for work in agriculture was extremely low, and this was aggravated by the fact that on an annual average 24 per cent of the manpower available to agriculture was unemployed.

Of the various types of work in agriculture, only threshing was fully mechanized. In 1935 there were only seven thousand tractors which could also be used for ploughing and draught animals did most of the ploughing and haulage, even on the large estates. Harvesting everywhere was almost exclusively by hand and, since manpower was cheap, even on the large estates which had reaping

¹ *Statisztikai Évkönyv, 1935* (Statistical Yearbook, 1935), Central Statistical Office, Budapest.

machines. Produce output and the yield of stock breeding were low in comparison with the developed industrial and agricultural countries.

In 1938², the last year of peace prior to World War II, there were, including family members, about 4.5 million people in Hungary – nearly half the population – making their living off agriculture. At the same time the number of those engaged in agriculture came to 2.1 million, of whom about one million were agrarian proletariat, and about half a million were in the semi-proletariat class. (Of these million and a half the number of farm labourers was about 250,000.) The number of smallholder and middle peasants was about 250 thousand each. There were 75 to 85,000 rich peasants, 5,000 owners of medium-sized estates, and about 1,000 owners of estates larger than 575 hectares.

Relying on their economic power, the large estate owning class, together with the finance capitalists, held state power until the liberation of the country. By means of a regressive taxation system, the fascist-like state of the finance capitalists and estate owners exploited the peasant farms, in particular the poorest ones. However, beginning with the outbreak of the world economic crisis of 1929–1933 even the rich peasants were economically weakened as a result of the sharp drop in agricultural prices, while the smaller peasant farms were in a very critical state. The low prices and high taxes put the peasantry at the mercy of the Banks.

In this way the large estate owning class and finance capital jointly dominated over agriculture and divided up the spoils resulting from both the exploitation of the agrarian proletariat, and the labour of the peasantry working on the estates.

A contributing factor to this economic situation was that the Hungarian ruling class, in order to carry on the predatory war on the side of Hitler's Germany, conscripted mainly the sons of the poorer peasants and that during the final stage of the war agriculture, together with the other branches of production, suffered tremendous losses. Of the livestock, 43.3 per cent was destroyed (the loss of draught animals was at about 64 per cent), while 37.9 per cent of the crops, 6.2 per cent of the buildings, and 4.7 per cent of the machinery and tools (30 per cent of these were power driven machines) were destroyed, etc.³

The democratic Hungarian state, established following the Liberation and embodying the power of the working class, of the peasantry, of the urban petty-bourgeoisie and of the anti-fascist bourgeoisie, viewed agriculture as one of the most important and most burning questions of Hungarian social progress, and the government on the basis of the plan proposed by the National Peasant Party at the initiative of the Hungarian Communist Party proclaimed the land reform decree in March 1945.⁴

A total of 3.2 million hectares was involved in the land reform. Of this, 1.9 million hectares became the personal property of rightful claimants – the 642,000 agricultural workers, labourers, owners of dwarf plots, as well as the smallholders and middle peasants with large families. The larger forested areas – 0.8 million hectares – were given to the state forestries. The land distributing committees

² *Statistikai Évkönyv, 1938* (Statistical Yearbook, 1938), Central Statistical Office, Budapest.

³ Dr. Fazekas, B.: *Mezőgazdaságunk a felszabadulás után* (Hungarian Agriculture After the Liberation), pp. 39–40, Mezőgazdasági Kiadó, Budapest, 1967.

⁴ See the study by Ágnes Ságvári in this volume.

marked 63,000 hectares for building sites and for reserve. State, experimental and model farms as well as district farms were established on 75,000 hectares. Most of the rest of the land was set aside for grazing. The livestock and farm equipment (barns, silos, distilleries, mills, tractors, small machines, tools, houses, draught animals, etc.) were distributed to those who received land. However, only a part of this livestock and equipment could be turned into personal property. The rest had to be reserved for the use of the agricultural cooperatives which were being planned by the new owners of land. Those who had received land were prohibited from selling it for a period of ten years.

The 1945 land reform was a revolutionary democratic act. As a part of the anti-fascist and democratic transformation it did away with the feudal remnants of agriculture. It eliminated the class of large and medium estate owners, and distributed the major part of the confiscated land to the landless peasants and those with little land to establish private and small farms.

Amidst the given historical conditions this revolutionary measure was the indirect preparation for the subsequent transition to socialism. Along with the feudal remnants it destroyed the main strength of agrarian capitalism while it also struck a powerful blow at bank capital, greatly curtailed kulak-capitalism and extended the state sector of agriculture which was now wholly under the leadership of a democratic popular state. By breaking the financial power of the owners of the large- and medium-sized estates, it also removed the base of their political power, while depriving finance capital of its foremost political support. The weakening of kulak capitalism prevented the rich peasantry from taking over the economical and political roles of the dispossessed large estate owners. And most important, it created the minimum economic basis for the alliance of the working class and working peasantry which, when developed, became the most important prerequisite for not only the defence of democratic achievements, but for beginning the transition to socialism as well.

Despite this, the rich peasantry, with the support of the urban bourgeoisie and the remnants of the large estate owning class and relying on a part of the working peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie, attempted from the autumn of 1945 to early 1947 to gain a leading role within the democratic coalition that was in charge of the state.⁵ Its aim was to repel the revolutionary forces of the working class and poor peasantry, to block the road to *non-capitalist* development, and to stabilize capitalist economic relations. However, this experiment was inevitably doomed to failure.

The catastrophic economic situation of the country made winning over the whole of the working peasantry much more difficult for the working class. Commodity exchanges between the cities and the villages had been severed, money depreciated, commodity exchange was replaced by the simple trading of produce, while "black marketeer" go-betweens in the trading of goods ruthlessly exploited the urban and rural working people. The state was forced to expand the system of obligatory deliveries⁶ from agriculture, introduced during the war,

⁵ See the study by Ágnes Ságvári in this volume.

⁶ The total surplus yield of bread grains, and most of the surplus yields of other crops and products had to be handed in.

while most of the peasant farms, particularly the ones with new owners, had to cope with a serious shortage of draught animals and other tools of the trade, and even with seed, fodder, etc. deficits. The situation only began to improve after the financial stabilization in the autumn of 1946, but at the beginning (until spring 1947) the State had to keep wide the ratio between agricultural and industrial prices in the interests of stabilization. The supply of manufactured goods to the villages improved but only slowly, and in 1947, for the third time since the liberation, agriculture suffered from serious drought. Despite this, in 1947–1948 agricultural output reached 71 per cent of that of the last peace year (1938–1939). In the spring of 1948 the country's number of livestock was already at 86.4 per cent of the 1938 level, and had almost been doubled as compared to the spring 1945. Of no less importance is the fact that despite their increased difficulties, the peasants, who had been given land, cultivated as much of it as the former owners had. This was born out by the fact that in 1947–1948 a much smaller portion of the country's arable land (1.6 per cent in all) remained fallow than in the prewar years. The peasantry had attained these results without any financial or other investment aid from the State worth mention. The upswing in the work of the peasantry and their achievements, for the most part, simply reflected the effects of the land reform, the democratization of the country, and their confidence in the future.

By 1948 the political situation had changed as well, and the majority of the former small holder and middle peasants lined-up with the working class and the alliance of the working class and working peasantry was strengthened. This change, aside from the financial stabilization of August 1946, was mainly due to the following:

- after January 1947 the adherents of the reactionary bourgeoisie were gradually driven out of the Independent Small Holders' Party (FKGP), thus decisively defeating the rich peasantry politically and transforming the FKGP into an organization which represented the interests of the working peasantry;
- by the summer of 1947 the ratio between agricultural and industrial prices was narrowed and the obligatory quotas to be delivered were slightly reduced.
- the results of the 1947 parliamentary elections and the subsequent nationalizations strengthened the leading role of the working class in state power and the Republic of Hungary, born in early 1946, became a state of the workers and working peasantry, that is, in essence a dictatorship of the proletariat;
- the nationalizations effected in the autumn of 1947 and the spring of 1948, in addition to crushing the economic supremacy of the bourgeoisie, resulted in the predominance of the developing socialist sector in the national economy and economically brought the small scale producing peasantry ever closer to the working class;
- in 1948 the reconstruction of industry was nearing completion and there was a marked improvement in the supply of manufactured goods to the villages;
- the unification of the Hungarian Communist Party (MKP) and the Social Democratic Party of Hungary (MSzDP) in the summer of 1948 had a strong effect on the peasantry too.

All the problems of the villages could not be solved, however, by protecting the land reform and its achievements by advancing the restoration of agricultural production, by expanding the commodity exchange between industry and ag-

riculture, by improving price ratios, nor by connecting the small producing peasant farms to socialist industry. Not even these highly significant changes themselves could create all the conditions necessary for the further rapid advance of agriculture.

As a result of the land reform, the breaking-up of the arable land and the number of farms grew, which in itself did not prevent the restoration of production, but could be expected, after a certain amount of time, to become an obstacle to development. Although the land reform had an equalizing effect on village society, due to increasing production the trend, as could have been expected, was again towards differentiation because the separate and isolated, new and old, individually worked farms would, for the most part necessarily lag behind the farms with more capital and, despite all State intervention, go bankrupt. While the land reform had dealt capitalism a great blow, it had not completely eliminated the village capitalist farms so it was only to be expected that the strengthening of the small producing sector by the land reform, would in time strengthen or revive Hungarian agrarian capitalism. In certain areas of the country there was not enough land to divide among those who were entitled to it, leaving a part of the agrarian proletariat without land and, additionally, there was little agricultural work available. Aside from this, there was an extensive hidden unemployment among the dwarf plotowners and small holders, because their small farms could only partly use the labour of the whole family, particularly because of the prevailing extensive farming. As a result of the damages of the war, agricultural output relied even more on manual labour and draught animals than before. And last but not least, following the nationalizations of 1947–1948 contradictions appeared between industry, which for the most part had become socialist, and small commodity producing agriculture, which was primarily based on private ownership.

The Hungarian communists, foreseeing this problem, began, as early as 1945–1946 to prepare to solve them. It was on their initiative that the state introduced progressive taxation and delivery quotas, regulated the use of draught animals by the peasant farms, took a stand against exorbitant yoke usury,⁷ while raising, as conditions allowed, the wages of agricultural labourers. In brief, having destroyed the large estates and curtailed kulak capitalism, the state began to regulate the degree of capitalist exploitation as well.

Shortly after the land distribution was completed, the communists also initiated the formation of cooperatives by the new owners. Between August 1945 and the end of 1947, 2,487 cooperatives of new owners, so-called "Farmers' Cooperatives", were formed throughout the country.

The direct objective of the "Farmers' Cooperatives", in addition to putting to use the undistributable assets gained in the course of the land reform, was to advance the productive, marketing and supply activities of its individual members and to educate them in the interests of jointly setting the newly established farms on their feet, and developing them on the basis of intensive farming. At the same time this varied type of small peasant cooperative made it possible for the roots of joint cultivation to develop within its framework. In addition to the mills, distil-

⁷ It was primarily the rich peasants and other owners of draught animals who demanded a disproportionately high repayment in manual work for the loan of their horses, oxen, or cattle, for ploughing or transport to peasants who needed, but did not own, draught animals.

leries, tractors, threshers, etc. owned and operated jointly, the members of these cooperatives could form groups to jointly carry out such activities as the handling of the larger vineyards and orchards, cultivation of industrial crops, working of the arable lands, establishment of rice fields, etc. To this extent, this type was, at the very outset, somewhat more than a simple cooperative of small peasants, because of its inherent possibility of, under favourable conditions, developing gradually into a socialist type of cooperative. The major guarantee for the future realization of this was that it was the sections of village society most interested in socialist developments who were grouped in these cooperatives and the leadership of the cooperatives – with few exceptions – was firmly in the hands of the most progressive elements of the poor peasantry. After the nation-wide formation of the farmers' cooperative movement, former land owning peasants were also permitted, by the autumn of 1947 to join these cooperatives. This, however, did not change the functions of cooperatives.

The establishment of the farmers' cooperative movement was the second large rural reform of the Hungarian people's democratic system. However, until 1948 it could mainly point to only organizational and political results. It became a factor in the political struggle against the reactionary forces and the poor peasants began to realize that only through cooperation could they improve their material well-being.

Until 1948 the majority of these cooperatives struggled under great economic difficulties. Payment for the shares which members took out came in very slowly due to their poverty and, at any rate, it was insufficient. No loans or other forms of material support could, for the time being, be expected from the State, and most of the leaders were still inexperienced. Under the given circumstances, it would only have been possible to accumulate capital for repairing cooperative property, paying for purchases and for other cooperative expenditures if they could participate in the growing commodity turnover between city and village. Therefore, initially the major effort of the "Farmers' Cooperatives" was concentrated on expanding their commercial activities. However, the realization of this effort was hindered by many factors.

Simultaneously with the formation of the Farmer's Cooperatives, there was a revival of the capitalist consumer and other cooperatives set up under the old system. These were under capitalist and rich peasant management and could rely on a large number of members from the circles of the old landowning peasants. However, it was not even they, but rather private, small businessmen who sold the bulk of the manufactured goods to the villages. And until 1948, it was also State authorized private businessmen who dealt with the deliveries of the quotas from the villages and bought up their products. In this way, commodity exchange between the village and the city had so far mainly added to the wealth of private capital and that of the capitalist type of cooperatives.

At the turn of 1947–1948, in order to achieve a more rapid maturing of the conditions for the transition to socialism, the Hungarian Communist Party worked out a new economic policy, which, among other things, resolved to develop further the cooperative movement as one of the important pillars of a future socialist economy. In the interests of getting material support for the Farmers' Cooperatives, the party was able to put through the proposal that the buying of part of the obligatory agricultural deliveries be entrusted by the State to the

"Farmers' Cooperatives" and that the state-owned factories and wholesale trade enterprises supply manufactured goods to the shops of the "Farmers' Cooperatives". At the same time it urged these cooperatives to develop their production-organization and joint production activities to a greater extent than ever before. In the interest of further developing the village cooperative movement and village policy in general, the party elaborated the following guidelines in the spring of 1948:

a. Unified village cooperatives had to be formed through the unification of the "Farmers' Cooperatives" and the other village cooperatives. However, kulaks and other capitalist elements may not be included as members of the "Farmers' Cooperatives" which are to become unified village cooperatives;

b. Within the framework of the "Farmers' Cooperatives", which are to be organized into unified village cooperatives, cooperative production has to be developed in general, and the formation of groups performing joint production tasks has to be accelerated;

c. For the time being, the simplest forms of producer groups have to be formed nationally and alongside these, conditions permitting, model agricultural producers' cooperatives, operating in a collective, large scale manner, have to be set up as well;

d. In order to help realize these objectives the lands rented out by the kulaks (the lands owned by the kulaks and other well-to-do persons not working in agriculture who had until then, rented out their lands to tenants) have to be put to use by the State and given to the landless and those with only small plots in order to organize producer groups and tenant cooperatives;

e. In order to help the producer groups and the peasants without draught animals, a network of state-owned machine stations have to be organized;

f. Greater restrictions have to be put on capitalist exploitation and the struggle for the elimination of the political influence of the kulaks has to be increased.

In conformity with the guidelines, the organization of the state-owned agricultural machine stations began in the summer of 1948, and kulak lands were put to use.

Between the autumn of 1948 and the spring of 1949, cooperative groups were formed on a large part of the rented lands in use. The producers' cooperative groups, depending on the extent to which their members wished to farm collectively, were classified into cooperatives of types 1, 2 and 3. Model by-laws were worked out for these three different types (it was only in type 3 that all branches of farming were collectivized, but here too the members were entitled to household plots of a certain size as well as to keep livestock) and by the spring of 1949 the mergers of the village cooperatives into the local "Farmers' Cooperatives" had been completed in all villages. These measures of the party met with the approval of a decisive part of the peasantry. This was also expressed in the fact that alongside the rural membership of the Hungarian Working People's Party (MDP) and those favourable to it, the decisive majority of the members and the leading bodies of the National Peasant Party (NPP) and the FKGP also favoured this type of socialist direction of the agricultural cooperative movement.

However, influenced by international events and other factors, the political line of the MDP was fundamentally and unfavourably altered. This shortly became the source of serious distortion in the political practice of the party and from the

spring and summer of 1949, resulted in the increased undermining of the relationship between the party and the rural working masses.⁸

Primarily this situation stemmed from the fact that the Rákosi group which usurped party and State leadership, wanted to realize the essential and correct objective of changing Hungary from an agricultural to an industrial country at a forced pace through the incorrect method of squeezing agriculture and neglecting the production of important industrial consumer goods, etc. The second reason was that the leadership, though it had proclaimed the opposite, had no faith in the possibility of the socialist reorganization of agriculture without the use of force and sought, primarily through economic pressure, to induce the peasantry to abandon private farming and join the cooperatives.

It is quite true that it was not easy to convince the masses of the Hungarian working peasantry to form cooperatives. Private farming had deep rooted traditions dating back to feudal times. In the era of capitalism the vast majority of the Hungarian peasantry, in contrast with the agricultural producers of the developed capitalist countries, could acquire no experience about the organization of producer cooperatives. And prior to liberation the propaganda of the counter-revolutionary regime presented a completely false picture of the socialist cooperatives of the Soviet Union, pointing them in the blackest colours possible, arousing fear among the peasantry. These fears could not be completely overcome in the course of a few short years. However, these difficulties could have been surmounted with no great effort had attention been given to the needs of the individually farming peasantry, to tenacious and understanding educational work, to the adherence to the principles of voluntariness and gradualness, and to the appropriate material support of the cooperatives, in other words, using all that is known from the teachings of scientific socialism. However, economic and other forms of pressure and the other mistakes regarding cooperatives in the policy of the party leadership prior to 1948, which will be discussed later, only seemingly made it easier to overcome the difficulties, but in reality only increased them.

While the implementation of the correct policy on cooperatives, established at the turn of year 1947–1948, was begun, the leading group of the MDP substantially changed its policy.⁹ In November 1948 Mátyás Rákosi specified three to four years as the time needed for the socialist reorganization of agriculture. The Party leadership revised this extremely short deadline in 1949 so that the bulk of the reorganization was to be completed by 1954, the end of the first Five Year Plan. Therefore, while the revision was favourable, it was by no means sufficient, for this almost complete transition to socialist, large scale farming needed political, financial, technical and intellectual conditions which could not be developed or created in so short a period of time. The inevitable result was that the pace of reorganization, which was dictated from above, could at best be maintained by seriously violating the Leninist principle of voluntary organization, and a large part of the cooperatives formed in this way could not be turned into truly modern large scale farms in the foreseeable future.

The planned pace of reorganization also violated, by necessity, the principle of gradualness. The target could only be realized by 1954 if the majority of the

⁸ See the study by András Zsilák in this volume.

⁹ Ibid.

peasant farms were combined, without any transitional forms whatsoever, into the most advanced type of cooperative. After one or two years of "acclimatizing", the members of the more elementary types of cooperatives were also reorganized into type 3 cooperative farm groups, which later became known as the agricultural producer cooperatives.

In 1949 the party leadership decided that the "Farmers' cooperatives" should primarily be developed into village retail trade organizations (mixed trade, pubs, butchers) while retaining some requisition duties and administrative control over the cooperative farm groups. At the same time they were to transfer the mills, grinders, distilleries, tractors, threshers, etc. to the respective state enterprises or state agricultural machine stations.

From then on the "Farmers' Cooperatives" became economically dependent on the state-owned wholesale trade enterprises. In practice the working peasantry lost the economic role which they had as a mass organization, but which had not been fulfilled due to lack of time and other conditions. Shortly afterwards the separation of the type 3 cooperatives from the "Farmers' Cooperatives" began and this meant giving up the former plan for establishing unified village cooperative. Since the "Farmers' Cooperatives" had to relinquish their machines and the cooperatives were prohibited from purchasing or possessing tractors, combines, etc., beginning with 1949, the state machine station network, which was being built up, became the monopoly owners of the machine pool for large scale agriculture. The state machine pool stations determined the number and quality of machines the cooperatives could use and when and where they could use them. The government later granted the managers of the machine stations the right to have a say in the production plans of the cooperatives that were within their area. Nevertheless, the machine stations played a decisively useful, irreplaceable role in the young producer cooperative farm movement.

Far more problematic was the influence of the compulsory delivery system and the activities of the state purchasing enterprises on the trends in cooperative farm production plans, their economies and incomes. The delivery and purchasing system had little concern for local production conditions and traditions and rigidly determined what and how much the cooperative was to produce. The finances of the cooperatives were managed by the local bank branches. This in itself would have been useful had the bank branches not gone beyond the management and control of finances. However, they had the right to interfere in the income distribution and investments of the cooperatives, considerably curtailing the latter's autonomy as well.

The party and State leadership provided considerable preferential treatment to the cooperatives, particularly to the independent and type 3 cooperatives over the individually working peasantry as to taxes and delivery obligations. The cooperatives were also given price reductions on materials needed for production and investment, annual credit and, moreover, outright grants. However, all of this otherwise substantial aid was not enough for most of the cooperatives. They had neither modern large scale installations nor farm buildings. They had few horses and cattle. Therefore, they mainly worked the land staying with mostly wheat and maize, but the state paid low prices and this too seriously harmed the cooperatives. A good number of cooperatives could accumulate little or nothing for investments. A large part of the funds needed for the most essential construction

and other investments was provided by state loans, with the result that many of them became overburdened with debts while their fixed assets per territorial unit remained small for a long time.

The extremely low state purchasing prices unfavourably influenced the cooperatives' production and commodity production and the incomes of their members. The grain output of the producer cooperatives quickly reached, and then surpassed, the average of the individually worked farms, because with the aid of the machine stations they were able to mechanize a large part of their work, but the resultant surplus was taken by the machine stations in payment for their work. The other crop yields and animal husbandry were, for many years, below the national average of the individually worked farms. Apart from the slow rise in production, the low prices also had a direct retarding effect on commodity production because the incentive was to divide up as large a part of the crop which remained after the compulsory deliveries, payment of land tax and machine station costs among their own members in kind on the basis of the so-called "work units", accrued in the course of the year.¹⁰ Therefore the state did not receive the desired amount of crops and products from the cooperatives, while, apart from payment in kind on the basis of their "work units", the cooperative farm members got very little cash. In cases of diligent work, the payment in kind (together with the output of their household plots) generally sufficed to meet their own food requirements, however, cash payments were in most cases insufficient to satisfy their other needs. This often gave rise to dissatisfaction among the members, impeding the stabilization of work discipline and the performance of high quality work. This at times obliged the authorities to use part of the state loans originally earmarked for investments to supplement the "work units" of the poorer cooperatives. This was also made necessary by the fact that though the cooperative movement showed a rapid numerical growth, prior to 1953 the national average incomes of cooperative farm families derived from "work units" (in kind and in cash), declined yearly: in 1950 it was 80.1 per cent, in 1951 it was 55.7 per cent and in 1952 it was 30.8 per cent of that of 1949.¹¹

This of course does not mean that the value of the "work units" declined in all cooperatives. Of the cooperatives which had been formed during the previous two, three and four years, (as proof of the viability of the cooperative farm movement), many became so strong that despite unfavourable economic circumstances they were able to increase or at least maintain the incomes their members derived from the "work units". These, however, were in the minority compared with those who had less to divide each year. And the national average income was even more strongly impaired by the fact that new cooperatives were constantly

¹⁰ The government set national norms on the basis of the quantity and type of the work performed by which each cooperative established work units to be credited to its members. At the end of the fiscal year, when cooperative accounts were closed, its leaders determined how many work units had been obtained by the members individually and as a whole. The total amount of the products and money left over was divided by the total number of "work units" accrued by the cooperative throughout the year and this was the amount of products and money to be paid for each work unit. The amount earned by the members was calculated by multiplying their kind and cash allowances with the number of their work units.

¹¹ *A mezőgazdaság áru-termelése és a mezőgazdasági népesség jövedelme* (Agricultural Commodity Production and the Incomes of the Agricultural Population). Report by the Central Statistical Office, p. 61, Budapest, November 23, 1953.

being formed and of these an increasing number had been collectivized by force or existed only on paper and for various reasons had not even started producing.

The low incomes from "work units" were, up to 1950, supplemented by the incomes from the sales of the crops and products of the household plots, as well as by the earnings of the increasing number of cooperative farm family members who went to work outside of the cooperatives (in industry, in the state farms, at the machine stations, etc.). However, beginning with 1951, the average incomes of even these families were below that of the previous years.

The indicated trends in the incomes situation, on the one hand, weakened the cooperative movement from within, and, on the other, increased the resistance of the individually farming peasants thus also halting the numerical growth of the producer cooperatives.

The farmers' cooperatives were organized at a rapid pace beginning with the fiscal year of 1948–1949 until the spring of 1953, generally in the autumn, winter and early spring months. As a result, by June 30, 1953 there were 3,768 of type 3 and independent agricultural cooperatives, and 1,456 of types 1 and 2 cooperatives. The independent agricultural cooperatives and those of type 3 had lands totalling 1,345,000 hectares (of this, 1,114,000 hectares were arable land) containing 225,869 families and 300,370 members. There were 67,681 families and 75,718 members working in types 1 and 2 cooperatives on a total of 274,000 hectares (of which 238,000 hectares were arable land). In other words, at the time the types 1, 2 and 3 producer cooperatives' and the independent agricultural cooperatives' total arable land came to 24.6 per cent of the total arable area of the country excluding the household plots, and to 26 per cent including household plots. (At the same time the arable land of the state farms, which had also multiplied since 1948, came to 12.2 per cent of the country's total.) Therefore, on a nation-wide level 38.2 per cent of the country's arable areas belonged to the socialist sector.¹²

It would be an error to view these unquestionably great achievements as simply the result of force. Until the autumn of 1949 and in the following year or two, a substantial part of the working peasants, including particularly the agrarian proletariat and owners of dwarf plots, voluntarily, from conviction chose the socialist way of farming. And this could not have been otherwise, for until the incomes of the members deteriorated as the result of distortions in economic policy, cooperatives opened the way to material and social improvement primarily for the poorest peasants. Beginning with the autumn of 1952, violations of the right to make free decisions became universal. By this time the incomes from work in the cooperatives, in most cases, no longer attracted even the poorest strata of the peasantry, while the rapidly developing industry offered unlimited employment opportunities. For the same reason and at the same time – particularly in the industrialized counties – there was a sudden rise in the number of members who arbitrarily left the cooperatives (since withdrawal was not permitted, the cooperative could not be left legally), and the number of family members who worked in the cooperatives also showed a rapid decline. From the autumn of 1952 to the spring of 1953 reorganization proceeded at the old pace, but almost exclusively as

¹² *Termelőszövetkezetek 1953, I. n. é.* (Cooperatives in 1953. Report on the second quarter of 1953.) Central Statistical Office, p. 3, Budapest, Aug. 13, 1953.

a result of pressure and the number of new members seldom exceeded those leaving. From March 31 to June 30, 1953 the number of cooperative farm members declined despite the continued organization, so that numerical growth was impossible under the circumstances.

The major means of direct pressure was the regrouping of plots of land. Whenever a cooperative was formed it was impossible to avoid such a regrouping because the cooperatives could not have been formed otherwise being made up of the scattered small plots of the members and of the reserve state lands given to the cooperatives to use.

However, the regrouping of plots was carried through in such a manner that the cooperative (and the state farm) obtained the best lands in the area. The small and middle peasants who were effected by this consolidation, but who did not want to join the cooperatives, received plots of poorer quality land and generally far from their places of residence. In many villages the consolidation of holdings was repeated almost annually. As a result, individual farming in these areas was made insecure. The working peasants effected by the plot regrouping either signed the membership applications, or offered their land to the state, or despite the uncertainty of being able to produce, continued with individual farming.

The policy of restricting exploitation by the kulaks, which would have been necessary under any circumstances, was changed, in the spring of 1949 to a policy of liquidating the kulaks.¹³

Due to financial pressure, land consolidation, and for other reasons, in the summer of 1949 the kulaks began to offer the whole or part of their lands to the state at an ever accelerating rate, so that the total area of the kulak farms, including that of the middle peasants who had been branded kulaks, dropped to one third by the summer of 1952 and continued to decline. The working peasantry also began in 1949 to offer their land to the state, but this only reached its peak in 1952 and the first half of 1953, and never even approached the extent of the kulaks.

The state farms and the cooperatives were given the land that was offered to the State, providing they had the manpower to cultivate it. However, by June 1953, as a result of the disowned and ownerless lands, the state had a land reserve of 575,000 hectares, which the socialist large scale farms could not incorporate.

In June 1953, the Central Leadership of the Hungarian Working People's Party, in a reexamination of party policy as a whole,¹⁴ came to important agricultural policy decisions. It took a stand in favour of increasing agricultural investments, raising agricultural output (including the output of the individually worked farms), slowing down the numerical growth of the cooperatives, and not allowing a further increase in the areas of the state farms. The resolution stressed that the

¹³ In all areas the authorities listed the kulaks, originally to determine who had to pay the increased tax and compulsory deliveries, and who were not allowed to join the cooperatives. Later, however, being listed became the starting point for social condemnation and unlawful violation of personal rights. Due to an incorrect and bureaucratic interpretation of who was a kulak, many middle peasants were also placed on the list. And persons whose names were put on the kulak lists, could not have their names stricken from the lists even if they reduced the size of their farms to that of the working peasants, or completely gave up farming and became workers.

¹⁴ See the study by András Zsilák in this volume.

producer cooperative farm continued to be the way of building socialism in the villages but the next task was not numerical growth but the economic strengthening of existing producer cooperatives, improving their yields and animal husbandry and raising their incomes.

In order to adhere consistently to the principle of voluntary membership the party decided that members should be allowed the option of withdrawing from the cooperatives at the end of the fiscal year and, if the majority of the members so decide, cooperatives should be allowed to be dissolved. The debts of the producer cooperatives to the State had to be re-examined and in part nullified and the fines on individually worked farms and cooperatives for non-fulfilment of the deliveries had to be eliminated. Those who completely met the 1953 delivery quotas, would start with a clean slate and have the delivery debts wiped off. Beginning with 1954, a new and simplified delivery system had to be introduced. The individually working peasants had to be given much more help in developing their farms so as to enable them to meet their delivery obligations, pay their taxes and take a good part of their produce to the free market. The policy on restricting and isolating the kulaks had to be continued, but the lists and molestation of the kulaks had to end. The resolution also stated that between the autumn of 1953 and spring of 1954 no partial plot regrouping was to take place. The reserve lands had to be cultivated, and measures had to be taken that the areas of these lands do not increase, but be reduced. Rental of the lands was to be permitted. The public services of the cities and villages had to be fundamentally improved and housing increased. And finally, legality, which had been violated, had to be restored in every respect.

The Central Leadership appointed Imre Nagy, who was being proposed for Prime Minister, to present the resolution in detail and in his parliamentary policy speech he falsified essential points of the resolution to conform with his own right wing views.¹⁵

As a result of the speech, the crisis of the producer cooperative farm movements, which had been developing since 1952, deepened and came to the surface. Another contributing factor was that, encouraged by the words of the Prime Minister, the kulaks and anti-cooperative forces, hoping to regain their land which had been included in the cooperative as well as their other property, began to agitate against, and in many areas even openly to attack, the resources of the cooperatives. Amidst such circumstances, in the autumn of 1953 the party and Government bodies could only restrain the large scale dissolution process of the farmers' cooperative farms by resolute, firm measures against hostile elements and by convincing the cooperative farm members.¹⁶ The result was that by the end of 1953 the crisis in the movement had essentially ended. The reason that the dif-

¹⁵ See the study by András Zsilák in this volume.

¹⁶ Between June 30 and December 31, 1953 the number of type 3, and independent agricultural cooperatives declined by 461 with a total area of 407,000 hectares (of this 370,000 hectares of arable land), the number of families by 79,351, and membership by 107,942. During the same time the cooperatives of types 1 and 2 decreased by 227, with an area of 407,000 hectares (63,000 of it arable land), the number of families by 16,441 and membership by 19,037. Central Statistical Office report on the operation of the cooperative farms in the second quarter of 1953 (August 13, 1953, p. 3) and on the operation of the socialist agricultural farms, 1954 (April 20, 1955, p. 45).

difficulties caused by the crisis were not completely overcome was for the most part due to the fact that the state aid to the cooperatives was less than what was needed in the given situation.

In contrast with the producer cooperative movement and farming, the individually worked farms expanded in the autumn of 1953. The inclination of the individually working peasantry to produce returned and, relying on their production, by 1954 the economic balance of the small and medium sized farms was generally restored. To a large extent this was due to the aid extended to production, to improvements in the villages' commodity supply, and to a more realistic taxation and more rational delivery system. Another helpful factor was that in 1954 the state had significantly increased purchasing prices (prices paid for products and produce bought from the cooperatives and private farms in excess of the compulsory deliveries). This measure made farming for the individually working peasantry profitable in most cases, since they had to invest comparatively much less than the cooperatives.

Following the recall of Imre Nagy, in the spring of 1955, for the time being by and large respecting the principle of voluntariness, the number of cooperative farms was increased halting the downward trend and their total area and membership showed a slight increase. The financial support given to the producer cooperatives also rose. At the same time the number of tractors for ploughing, of which there were 10,124 at the machine stations on December 31, 1954, and a further 4,844 at the state farms, grew by 6,457 during 1955.¹⁷ In June 1955 the Central Leadership of the MDP adopted a comprehensive resolution on the development of agricultural production. It sought to realize the socialist reorganization of agriculture, combined with a significant upswing in production in the course of the coming five year plan.

As the result of measures taken by the party and the State, and the favourable weather, the harvest in 1955 was good, increasing the income of both the cooperatives and the individually farming peasants. At this time the greater part of the average per hold (1.42 acres) yields of the crops of the arable land of the cooperatives was in excess of that of the individual farms, and the animal breeding of the cooperatives also showed improvement.

However, in 1955, primarily due to a drastic reduction in imports, agriculture received less artificial fertilizer than in the year before, and the government had considerably increased the taxes of the individually worked farms, as well as the quotas of the compulsory deliveries from the producer cooperatives and individually worked farms.¹⁸ In the background to this were the nation's external debts, which the Rákosi group wanted to eliminate far too rapidly not so much by improving the production system as by increasing agricultural and industrial exports, decreasing imports of consumer goods and materials deemed less important, and curtailing consumption by peasants and workers. In addition to all of this, a new campaign to organize cooperatives began in many of the counties during the autumn of 1955 and until the spring of 1956.

¹⁷ Report on the execution of the June 1953 resolution of the Central Leadership of the MDP. Report by the Central Statistical Office, p. 11, January 27, 1956.

¹⁸ The latter occurred by prescribing the amounts which the farms had to sell to the state purchasing bodies at "free" purchase prices in excess of the determined quotas of the compulsory deliveries, and while the peasantry was not seriously hurt economically, the free market had again narrowed.

The taxation and collection drives, and the newer distortions of the agrarian policy did not result in the same economic upsets as in 1952-53. However, politically they were highly damaging to the prestige of the party and government bodies and largely contributed to the rapid and nation-wide strengthening of revisionist and hostile influences.

Following the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union it became clear once and for all that the Rákosi leadership neither could, nor wanted to learn from the past. In its agrarian policy, the only change it would agree to was the rehabilitation of the middle peasants who had been on the kulak lists and this was done throughout the country in the summer of 1956. It did not deal with the many problems of the producer cooperative farms, nor with those proposal which came from the party, aimed at ending or at least considerably modifying the compulsory delivery system. In July 1956 the Central Leadership of the MDP recalled Mátyás Rákosi from his post as Secretary General and approved a resolution, free of both right and left wing distortions, on the political situation and tasks. However, the counter-revolution, which broke out on October 23, 1956, prevented its implementation. The elaboration and realization of a consistent communist policy, including elimination of errors in agrarian and peasant policy, became the tasks of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP), which replaced the MDP, and of the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers'-Peasants' Government after the defeat of the counter-revolution.

The November 27, 1956 appeal of the Revolutionary Workers'-Peasants' Government was the first detailed expression of the policy it wished to follow in the villages. The government announced that it had ended the compulsory delivery system, eliminated the forced consolidation of plots, condemned forced organization of cooperatives and all of those methods which had resulted in the decline of Hungarian agriculture to a position which it would take years to overcome. It considered its fundamental task to be the intensive development of agriculture, ensuring steady production and material incentives for the producers. The government emphasized that it would support all cooperative and individual farming which increases agricultural output, while at the same time it would prevent all activities aimed at exploitation. It left the method of farming to be decided by the peasants themselves, in other words, whether to maintain, or to organize cooperatives, and what forms they are to take. The government also announced that it would grant preferential credits and installment payments to the farms which operated well and efficiently so that they may get the machines and material, as well as construct the buildings needed for production. It ensured preference for the cooperatives in obtaining machines for their work, allowed the establishment of producer cooperative farm processing plants, and enabled the cooperatives to process, grade, transport and market agricultural raw material. Depending on how intensely the producer cooperative is farmed, it would provide financial assistance to employ agricultural experts. It would support all forms of cooperatives formed by the peasantry (production, machine use, purchasing, marketing associations and cooperatives) which were aimed at developing agricultural output and increasing the incomes of the working peasantry. The government stated in its appeal that it had considered it necessary to formulate a cooperative law which would proclaim that *the working peasants themselves had to decide on the kind of by-laws they wanted to regulate the activities of the coopera-*

tives and to make their own decisions on income distribution, and to allow no interference whatsoever in the affairs of the cooperatives.

The counter-revolution affected the villages¹⁹ as well but it did not have the same mass base there as in Budapest and a number of other large towns. Despite long standing serious grievances the majority of the peasantry remained comparatively calm and this was mainly due to the following three reasons:

a. the elimination of the compulsory delivery system;
b. the radio speech made by Cardinal Mindszenty on November 3, in which he openly announced the restoration of the large estates and the capitalist system, from which the peasants clearly understood that the land distributed to them in 1945 was being endangered;

c. and last but not least, the local bodies of the counter-revolution, the so-called "revolutionary committees" and the "national guard" were almost everywhere in the hands of former Horthyist officials, military officers, gendarmes, kulaks and criminals who had been let out of the prisons. These people were known for what they actually were in the villages and for this reason the counter-revolution was unable to guise itself with the cloak of democracy.

The major endeavour of the counter-revolutionary elements in the villages was to dissolve the local bodies of workers' power, and to break up the cooperative farms. They tried to achieve this by attacking the leaders of the cooperatives, by persecuting and creating fear among the members, by arson, destruction and by inciting people to steal the property of the cooperative farms.

The disintegration of the producer cooperatives could already be felt in the summer of 1956. However, at that time the desire to dissolve or to leave the cooperatives was only in the cooperatives which had been forced to organize in the period between the autumn of 1955 and the spring of 1956, and was rooted in the members forced to join at the time. This process of dissolution was understandably accelerated under the pressure of the counter revolution, but it never reached the proportions expected by the counter-revolutionary forces. In late October and in November, when the enemy forces were still able to pillage freely in the villages 72 per cent of the cooperatives had remained intact. (742 type 3 cooperatives, and autonomous agricultural cooperatives, as well as uncountable, many other cooperatives stayed together.) The producer cooperatives began to dissolve on a large scale at the time when external pressure was reduced, reaching the lowest point about mid-January 1957. The major reason for this was that with the elimination of the former economic and administrative pressure on the individual working peasants, the majority of middle and small peasants who had joined the cooperatives again returned to individual farming. A contributory fact was that the government increased the wages of industrial workers and some of the producer cooperative members, who had formerly been agrarian proletariat or owners of dwarf plots, wanted to work in industry. An interesting trend in this difficult period was that paralleling the trend toward the dissolution of and withdrawal from the cooperatives, the voluntary reorganization of the dissolved cooperatives was also started. (In more than one village one large cooperative was dissolved to be replaced by two smaller cooperatives, or part of the members who

¹⁹ See the study by Henrik Vass in this volume.

had withdrawn, formed cooperatives of their own.) The final result is shown in the following figures.²⁰

Aside from these, a survey completed on March 31, 1957 showed that there were still "Farmers' Cooperatives" with 1,811 specialized groups and associations operating within its framework (bee-keeping, rice producing, fruit and

Collective Agricultural Cooperatives

Time	Number of cooperatives	Total area in hectares	Arable area in hectares	Number of families	Number of members
Oct. 15 1956	3,954	1,304,201	1,090,975	235,571	298,474
May 1 1957	2,570	682,651	508,375	96,940	122,296

Producer Cooperative Groups

Time	Number of cooperatives	Total area in hectares	Arable area in hectares	Number of families	Number of members
Oct. 15 1956	1,057	199,211	169,855	54,013	58,546
May 1 1957	928	141,279	124,346	34,693	38,306

grape growers, vegetable producers, crop producers, animal breeding and other groups and associations). They had a membership of 51,135 and their collective land area was 22,078 hectares.

The socialist producer cooperative farm movement, despite its tremendous losses, proved more resistant to the storm of counter-revolution and the attractions of private farming than anyone would have believed and it had become firmly rooted among the Hungarian peasantry.

It was mostly the agrarian proletariat and owners of dwarf plots who remained loyal to the cooperatives, but so did many enlightened small and middle peasants. The main force holding these cooperatives together at the time was the state reserve lands which the state had put at their disposal for good (78 per cent of the areas of the retained and re-formed cooperatives was state reserve land). But this was not the only reason, for with this there was also the cooperative way of life

²⁰ PI Archives, fond 288, 2/1957-27-35. Report on the situation of the cooperatives, May 29, May 30, and October 14, 1957.

which meant release from casual farm labour and servitude, ensured human dignity and the great promise of a future for the village poor.

Despite the great shocks the average yields of the producer cooperatives in 1957 and 1958 were in general larger than those of the individually worked farms and the level of animal breeding also rose despite the fact that in the spring of 1957 animal breeding had to be started practically all over again in many cooperatives. The good yields, as well as the favourable farming conditions created by the Revolutionary Workers'-Peasants' Government led to the further stabilization of the producer cooperatives' property and to a rise in the members' income. And the endurance, diligence and growing stabilization of their property rapidly enhanced the prestige of the producer cooperatives in the eyes of the individually farming peasantry.

Following the counter-revolution the agricultural producers had to make payments in kind (wheat and other grains) only for land tax, threshing and mill grinding. The rest of their crops and surpluses could be sold for cash and this had a great impact on the whole of the economy. Quite naturally, the state maintained its central role in the crop economy even then. However, central storage of stocks was now completely secured, aside from the incomes in kind already mentioned, through planned and organized free purchasing, and from making crop growing and animal breeding contracts. In general, the planned and organized free purchasing by the state and the system of production contracts made the supply of agricultural commodities to the domestic consumer and the supply of agricultural raw materials to industry more reliable. It made the increase of the state's agricultural exports possible, while at the same time it was also extremely favourable from the point of view of disposing of the commodities of the agricultural farms. When negotiating the plant cultivation and animal breeding contracts the state always proposed satisfactory and favourable contracts to the producer cooperatives giving them special support in this way as well.

The MSzMP and the Revolutionary Workers'-Peasants' Government, continuing to regard the development of agricultural production as a task of primary importance, set prices in such a way that it should also be profitable for the individually worked farms to produce.²¹

In order to induce the producer cooperatives to increase commodity production the State tied the granting of credits to enable normal operations to appropriate commodity marketing contracts. This, however, also had a negative effect for the purchasing and contracting enterprises once again had too much power over the producer cooperatives.

In the spring of 1957, the cooperatives of the various types, as well as some of the specialized groups and associations indicated the strong desire to purchase their own machines. They mainly wanted all-purpose tractors which were economical and would allow them to be independent of the machine stations, particularly in making deliveries, and permit reduction of their horse stocks at the

²¹ The new agricultural producer price levels corresponded to a weighted average of the 1955 collection and state free purchasing prices. It paid a premium to the cooperatives for large volumes of identical quality commodities, set preferential machine station prices, granted preferential investment credits and maintained the old preferential tax. For the time being the so-called "state farm prices" which had been determined on the basis of their production capacities remained in effect for the state farms.

same time. However, this intent to purchase machines came up against great obstacles. Hungary did not manufacture all-purpose tractors and for financial and other reasons was only able to import a few, which were primarily used by the state farms and the machine stations.

The respective governing bodies of the State were not of one mind as to whether the cooperatives should get tractors, despite the fact that the leading organizations of the party were definitely in favour of granting the producer cooperatives the right to purchase them. And finally, many cooperatives which wanted to buy tractors could have only done so if they obtained state loans to cover their purchases.

The party overcame the resistance of the state apparatus, but in view of the objective difficulties it decided that for the time being only the economically strong producer cooperatives would be permitted to purchase such tractors. At the same time, in order to aid all cooperatives, it succeeded in having a part of the machine station tractors and crew permanently stationed at the agricultural produce cooperatives during the busiest work periods, to be at their disposal. In this way the cooperatives became less dependent on the machine stations but their own machine pools grew slowly. In 1960, when more machines were being imported, and in order to induce a more effective exploitation of the cooperatives' material forces, the state, at the initiative of the party, rescinded the previous limits on cooperative tractor purchases and from then on even gave large loans to aid such purchases. Within a few years the whole aspect of the agricultural produce cooperatives was greatly changed.

From the spring of 1957 to early 1958 the number of producer cooperative farms did not increase and during 1958 growth was very gradual. At the same time individual farming went through what had seemed to be a renaissance, which gave rise to misgivings and intolerance among certain members of the party. However, keen observers noted that already at the beginning of 1958 the investments of the individually farming peasantry had slowed down and that large masses of the peasantry were undoubtedly beginning to feel that individual farming could not be maintained for long. The younger generation continued to be attracted by the industrial and intellectual occupations, so that without the necessary manual labour, and this every peasant knew well, there was no future for individual farming.

The leaders of the MSzMP and of the government did not in the least abandon the goal of further increasing the number of cooperatives and carrying the movement through to its completion. This was emphasized in every state and party document dealing with the tasks of the development of agriculture and socialist society following the defeat of the counter-revolution. However, because of the country's general situation, the mood of the peasantry and the future of the cooperative farm movement, they wanted to prepare and base this development on the economic stabilization of the cooperatives, by planning the conditions for a new reorganization, and by the satisfactory development of other areas of the national economy. In Hungary, where the producer cooperatives movement had already undergone two major crises, it would have been irresponsible to begin another unfounded cooperative organizational campaign. This would have been contrary to the realistic policy of the MSzMP.

The leading bodies of the party and of the state debated throughout 1958 about the most expedient way to achieve the numerical growth of the cooperatives. In the beginning there were two views. According to one "the break through" had to take place in the small villages, following an adequate political preparation. In these areas (so as to avoid repeated regrouping of plots), an effort had to be made to reorganize entire villages at once, and if possible form collective agricultural producer cooperative farms of the highest type. According to the other point of view the primary aim of the near future was to form cooperative farm groups and other simple cooperative types, while organizing the new agricultural producer cooperatives. At the same time, that form of cooperative in which all the arable land plant cultivation is collectivized needed to be developed, because it was not only easier to attain than the collectivization of animal breeding, but also required less material investment. In the course of this debate a third variation developed which adopted elements of the other two. This stated the following:

- after adequate local political and organizational preparations an attempt should be made to reorganize the entire peasantry of a village;
- in the course of the reorganization the primary aim should be to establish the highest type of agricultural producer cooperatives, but where this is not possible, cooperative farm groups should be formed;
- the counties and districts are given no quotas. They themselves have to decide after a careful analysis of the situation where the conditions were most suitable for reorganization;
- in order that there not be a drop in the agricultural output of the country, the reorganization should not begin at once in all districts and counties of the country;
- the principle of voluntary cooperation is to be adhered to, but this is not to imply that efforts to convince the peasant should be neglected;
- the party, and all government bodies, the mass organizations and the factories and enterprises are all to cooperate to further the socialist reorganization of agriculture.

Following the debate on the details of the agricultural policy and on the reorganization, the December 1958 resolution of the Central Committee of the MSZMP stated that the political and economic situation has made possible a more rapid development of the cooperative farm movement, which could already begin in 1959. Furthermore, it pointed out that conditions for a sudden growth do not as yet exist, but could occur in the foreseeable future. In order to bring about these conditions a greater and deeper confidence in party policy and in the prestige and political influence of the party among the masses of working peasants had to be brought about. The working class had to be made more conscious of the fact that the socialist reorganization of agriculture is in their own interest and that it is their task to lead the peasantry onto the socialist road. Through education the peasantry had to be made aware that only large scale socialist farming can free them from being at the mercy of nature and create opportunities for cultural growth. The fight against rural class enemies and capitalist tendencies required constant attention. The rural party organizations had to be revitalized and the standard of party work in the villages to be raised. The use of machinery and artificial fertilizer had to be increased in the cooperatives, their yields raised sharply, be run more economically thereby to assert the superiority of cooperative large scale production.

Comprehensive government resolutions (the so-called No. 3004 government resolutions) appeared annually from the beginning of 1958 to 1961, on the extent and method of state financial and other material aid to the cooperatives. The No. 3004 government resolutions and the resultant economic measures were an effective means of improving the fixed assets of the cooperatives, extending their production activities, increasing their commodity production, making experts available and emphasizing productivity, all of which resulted in winning the respect of the entire peasantry. Each year beginning with 1959, the government gave the greater part of the material aid earmarked for agriculture to either newly formed cooperatives or to those which had significantly expanded territorially.

In order to make it easier for the small and middle peasantry to join the cooperatives, the government, on the proposal of the Central Committee, issued a decree making it compulsory for the cooperatives to pay ground rent on the land which the joining members had legal title to and brought with them into the cooperatives for communal use. However, the sum paid out each year in ground rent could not exceed twenty-five per cent of the distributable income. (In other words, the major part of the income still had to be distributed in proportion to work completed, in the form of work units and bonuses.)

On the basis of the guidelines of the Central Committee resolution of December 1958, the county leading bodies analyzed the local conditions and possibilities for accelerating the reorganization and in each county groups of fifty to one hundred communist activists were formed. Where the village situation was favourable, the village party organizations and the councils had set up cooperative development committees of twenty to forty members, consisting of representatives of the various sections of the working peasants, teachers as well as the representatives of the artisans' and other village cooperatives. They took care that these committees be composed only of people who were held in high esteem. The committees had the task of preparing plans for the formation of cooperatives, or for the expansion of existing ones. They were to begin organizing on this basis, carefully explaining the advantages of cooperation and its importance from the point of view of the working peasantry of the entire village and of the whole nation.

Simultaneously, the state farms, the industrial plants and other bodies prepared to assist in the reorganization and to patronize the newly formed cooperatives. To the groups of activists in the counties, industrial workers, intelligentsia and white collar workers, familiar with the villages, were assigned who together comprised smaller groups (organizing brigades) helping the local cooperative development committees in their work.

The reorganization began in January and February of 1959 and in two months time had brought unexpected, tremendous results. Entire villages, districts, counties switched over to cooperative farming almost at once, and nearly everywhere they chose the highest type of cooperative, the agricultural producer cooperatives. With few exceptions, the movement did not advance in the regions where the party and state bodies had mostly expected, but primarily in the developed small scale commodity producing regions, areas which had been known to be conservative. One of the particular features of the reorganization was that in the village of these regions it was generally the well-to-do, or best farming peasants who were the first to sign the statements of entry and to announce the forma-

tion of the cooperatives. When this was publicized, generally in the course of a few days, or, at most, one or two weeks, the rest of the peasants in the village followed suit.

The decision to join was of course a difficult one for many. It meant that the peasants had to break with a form of farming and a life style which had centuries old roots. And they had to make this break at a time when it was economically viable to farm individually and they not only saw cooperatives which had worked well, but many weak ones as well. They felt, in fact knew, that the future was in socialist large scale farming. Nevertheless, there were quite a few who would have liked to work individually for a few more years under the conditions which the MSzMP and the Revolutionary Workers'-Peasants' Government had provided.

To convince the waverers required perseverance of the organizers of the cooperatives in explaining the issues involved. Peasants, who had already joined the cooperative, participated in this work. Prior to 1956, in the years of heavy pressure on the peasantry, a special kind of "peasant unity" had developed on the cooperative question in the circles of the individually farming peasants. The peasants of many villages had a tacit understanding that none of them would join a cooperative until the majority were in favour of it. This hindered the development of the cooperative movement for years. This "peasant unity" still prevailed, but while in the past it was an influence against the formation of cooperatives, now it provided its greatest impetus.

In early spring 1959 the party had decided that all available forces had to be concentrated on making it possible for the cooperatives, which had been formed during the winter, to develop large scale farming. Without this the achievements would have been wasted and in the new fiscal year it would have been impossible to continue the reorganization at the pace set at the beginning of the year.

Partial consolidation of plots had generally no longer been necessary, for there were few if any individual farms left in the cooperative villages. But general land consolidation could not be avoided. In many villages not one but two, three or even more cooperatives were formed (depending on what the population wanted, and each could freely choose which to join) and, since the farms of the memberships were scattered, land had to be exchanged between the cooperatives. Many peasants had land in neighbouring villages too and therefore land was exchanged between the respective villages also. Also, there were exchanges between the state farms and the cooperatives. Moreover, in addition to the arable lands, the meadows and pastures also had to be proportionately divided among the cooperatives. The area of the village itself also had to be precisely demarcated from the cooperative lands, because these in all cases remained in private ownership and to be worked privately, and the areas which were to belong to the household plots of the members had to be marked off from the fields of the cooperatives.

The size of the household plots of the members was set by the majority of the cooperatives at one *cadestral hold* (1 c. h. = 2.27 acres) each, which included the kitchen gardens and orchards of the members. As a result, each member was entitled to as much space for a household plot as was needed to increase the size of his kitchen garden or orchard to one *cadestral yoke*. Aside from this each household was allowed to have one milk cow, one or two young steer, as well as one sow and piglets, several porkers and an unlimited number of poultry.

The cooperatives elaborated their long term economic plans and annual production plans with consideration for climatic, soil, and manpower conditions, the farming traditions of the village, the market and other economic conditions. Many experts (agronomists, engineers, and financial experts, etc.) cooperated in elaborating these plans in response to the invitation of the party and state organs.

As a consequence of the influx of masses of small and middle peasants the ratio of land owned by the members increased suddenly within the land stock of the producer cooperatives and the new entrants brought far more livestock and farming equipment into the producer cooperatives than they had in the past. The larger number of livestock and increased equipment made it easier for the cooperatives to begin farming. The improvement in cattle stock, as well as the development of swine, sheep and poultry breeding were important and the government therefore gave breeding stock to the cooperatives under preferential conditions.

As a result of the efforts of the peasantry and the effective aid of the socialist state, the newly developed and significantly increased producer cooperatives on the whole showed a healthy development and in 1959 many cooperatives which had been formed earlier, were able to rise from being weak to a medium standard and many of the medium ones rose to the ranks of the good ones. In the autumn the harvest was outstanding.

The second stage of reorganization began in November 1959, and lasted until the end of February 1960. The hostile propaganda, endeavouring to prevent the formation of cooperatives, the basic tone of which was set by Radio Free Europe, now became more felt than in early 1959 when the movement's rapid and tremendous success took enemies at home and abroad by surprise. Despite this, the turn of the year 1950-1960 brought results similar to those of the former large scale reorganization campaign. Now 70 per cent of the areas of the country had become cooperative farm villages (and towns), and 70 per cent of the country's total ploughed area also belonged to the socialist sector of agriculture (the cooperative farms and the state farms combined).

In late February the party again mobilized the forces of society to stabilize the newly founded or significantly increased cooperatives. In 1960, the state increased the financial, production and other aid provided to agriculture as compared to the previous year. However, considering the large number of socialist farms, some of the newly formed cooperatives received less in state support than in the previous year. Aside from this there was a great shortage in building capacities, hindering completion of construction which had been begun by the cooperatives, as well as the starting of an adequate number of new building projects. Amidst such conditions from the point of view of providing a material base for the new cooperative farms, increasing the material contributions of the members and the building of temporary structures to alleviate construction problems was of great importance.

Many of the producer cooperative farm members were willing to increase their material contributions. There was a large demand in the new producer cooperatives for machinery and in many cases the members collected from among themselves the full or most of the price of the machine. There were many cooperatives in which the members voted cash contributions for other investments, or added their sows and poultry to the horses and cattle they brought in to the cooperatives,

despite the fact that they were not required by the state to do so. At the same time there was a growing number of farms which lacked the readiness to sacrifice and where a substantial fraction of the members did not participate in joint work and where the younger peasants left agriculture to work in industry.

The cause of the absenteeism from joint work was that the "work unit" system did not provide the members with a sufficient incentive to work and the expected income of the first few years was comparatively low. Then, too, the cooperatives only paid their members once a year, in one lump sum. At the same time many of the members had sufficient food reserves, which together with the output of the household plots, enabled them to live. In order to strengthen work discipline, the party proposed to the cooperatives that they modify the "work unit" system, and if possible go over to a system of regular monthly cash advance payments.

The difficulties were increased by the fact that in 1960 (and for the next two years) the weather in Hungary was extremely unfavourable for agriculture. Partly because of the difficulties, but primarily because practically all of the good land in the grain producing area of the country was now within the socialist sector and also because it would have been favourable from the point of view of the state's capacity if the increasing tempo of support to agriculture could be moderated, the question arose as to whether it might not be necessary to slow down the further pace of transformation. However, such a slowing down was impossible because it would have caused the country serious financial harm. While the peasantry of the yet unorganized areas worked diligently, they did not fertilize their land and did not plant perennial crops. The peasants, who were still farming individually, began to stock up large reserves and sold little grain and maize to the state purchasing bodies, and this, if continued, would have caused disruptions of the public supply.

Consequently, the leading party and state bodies consented to continue with the organization of producer cooperatives during the summer of 1960 and reorganization proceeded at an even more rapid pace with the arrival of fall. At the same time, in response to an appeal of the party, the peasantry of the grape and fruit-growing areas formed elementary associations – grape and fruit-growing cooperatives – which were gradually developed and are still being developed into large scale collective farms.

Beginning with 1959, the cooperatives were also joined by many elderly peasants who, due to their age, had no pension rights and there were quite a few such elderly peasants outside of the cooperatives, who worried about their futures. The Central Committee of the MSzMP thought it proper for society to help them. Therefore, the government decided that 70 year old men and 65 year old women, who had no pension rights and who were no longer capable of getting a pension, as well as the disabled and incapacitated, should receive a regular monthly old age or disability allowance. Cooperative farms pensioners and those receiving either old age or disability allowances had to be given household plots just as active members (generally 0.6 hectares in size) and were allowed to supplement their incomes with lighter work, to a level of 120 "work units" annually for men and 80 units for women. In this way, the problem of the elderly peasants was temporarily and in a reassuring way taken care of.

In order to ensure a smooth supply of foodstuffs to the country and to improve the incomes of producer cooperative farm members the Central Committee of the

party came out in favour of advancing the production of the household plots. It called on party and state bodies to help the producer cooperative farm members so that, besides cultivating and strengthening the common farms in every way they could, they should also be able to sell as many commodities as possible (swine, poultry, potatoes, vegetables, fruit, milk, eggs, etc.) through the purchasing bodies. At the same time, they also urged the cooperatives to help their members so that, besides their good and primary work on the common farm, to make the best possible use of the household plots, to satisfy their own needs as well as those of the national economy.

After such preliminaries, the new large organization campaign, launched in the autumn of 1960, resulted, by mid-February 1961, in what was essentially the completion of the socialist reorganization of agriculture. By this time 90 per cent of the country's plough land was in the socialist sector (14 per cent belonged to the state farms, 72 per cent to the agricultural producers' cooperatives and 3 per cent to the more elementary forms of cooperatives).

What was the secret of the complete and rapid success of 1959–1961, of the deeper and more significant change in agriculture than at any previous time?

In the course of a decade and a half the Hungarian peasantry had acquired considerable experience. They learned to appreciate and value the machines of the large farms. They recognized and acknowledged the backwardness of small scale farming and the superiority of mechanized, large scale farming. They became clear on the inevitable course of the country's economic and political development. As opposed to the policy of the MDP, they had confidence in the leadership and the policies of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. At the same time the majority of the peasants soberly weighed the lack of perspective of their own private farming, the improving farming methods of the cooperatives, which had been formed earlier, and considered international power relations, the increased strength of the socialist world system.

The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and the government, with a series of concrete measures, made it easier for the hundreds of thousands of peasants to come to a decision. They provided greater and more effective state support to the cooperatives, made payment of ground rent compulsory, provided satisfactory support to household plot farming, took care of the elderly members of the cooperatives, etc. As a result of the increased support to the producer cooperative farms, agriculture, now in the years of the transformation, got back almost all of what the state had accumulated in this same period from agriculture through the price and tax system. The party tactics were correct. It chose well the time to accelerate the transformation. It thoroughly prepared the work of winning over the peasants and it involved large numbers of workers in the brigades that were sent to the villages. It did not begin organization simultaneously throughout the entire country. It was careful not to infringe on the principle of voluntarism and refrained from unwarranted haste which was at times urged. After each large organizational campaign, it immediately used all of its available forces to concretize the results. It did not endeavour to attain only partial results in the various villages, but strove to transform entire villages, so that there was no need for the re-grouping of plots when establishing large scale farms.

Of course, even so it was difficult for the peasantry to take the road to cooperative farming. Despite their own sober convictions, many of them worked only

half-heartedly for years after having joined. But later they became convinced that it would have been wrong to wait any more after 1959–1961.

The producer cooperative movement brought tremendous and irreversible changes to the Hungarian village.²²

It had finally erased the old class distinctions within the peasantry and brought them closer to the socialist working class in outlook, in relation to work and their way of life. At the same time the farming cooperatives themselves, which today include 77 per cent of the country's arable land have changed enormously. They are becoming modern, mechanized large scale farms rapidly increasing the productivity of labour, engaging in various industrial undertakings and employing many professional, industrial and agricultural skilled workers. However, a description and analysis of this development and its consequences will be the task of the future.

The Main Features of the Development of Social Relations in Hungary (1956–1966)

by

Henrik Vass

The history of the decade treated in this study is an outstanding chapter in Hungarian history. This period is an integral continuation of almost one hundred years of struggle waged by the Hungarian working class for socialism. It is the continuation and completion of the profound social transformation that started at the turn of 1944 and 1945 with the establishment of a people's democracy and led to the laying of the foundations of socialism. At the same time this decade is a separate and organic period of the creative application of Marxism to Hungarian reality.

In 1944–1945 the revolutionary Hungarian working-class movement was faced with the task of achieving national independence, annihilating fascism and ensuring democratic rights for the people. In the course of accomplishing this, it had to create the pre-requisites of the struggle for the change to socialism. These were the goals for which the working class had fought prior to and during the Second World War, but it only became possible to achieve these aims as a result of the country's liberation by the Soviet army. This opened up a new era in the struggle for the establishment of workers' power. As a result of a three year long struggle, first the big landowners and then the bourgeoisie were gradually ousted from power. This struggle was waged by the working class in alliance with the other employed strata of society; with the progressive representatives of the peasantry, the urban petty-bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia. The peoples' state took possession of the means of industrial production. The two workers' parties, whose alliance was a decisive factor the victory of in the socialist revolution, united in 1948. Thus workers' power was finally victorious and brought to an end the most important period hitherto in the history of our country.

The social struggles of the succeeding years, from 1948 to 1962, that is, until the completion of the socialist reorganization of agriculture, were determined by the foremost objective, to lay the foundations of socialism. The counter-revolution and the struggle against it, the formation and the beginnings of the activity of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSzMP) did not alter this goal, though its achievement was temporarily delayed by the counter-revolutionary offensive. The task of the socialist reorganization of agriculture also had to be temporarily postponed but in 1958 we were well prepared to start carrying out this complicated task. A new stage began in 1962 when the Eighth Congress of the MSzMP asserted that the foundation of socialism had been laid down and set the goal of completing the building of socialism.

The counter-revolution in the autumn of 1956 and its suppression did not represent a new stage in the history of the struggle for socialism. However, the year

²² See the study by Henrik Vass in this volume.

1962 divides the ten years of the MSzMP history examined here into two parts and it will be dealt with in greater detail later on. Why is it then necessary to examine the history of this decade in an independent study in its entirety?

The answer to this question is closely related to a historically correct evaluation of the counter-revolution itself and of subsequent developments. The attempt of bourgeois propaganda to present post-1957 developments as the product of the counter-revolution rather than as the initial results of a long-term policy, which also eliminated the shortcomings of the previous period, was not entirely ineffectual. It is revealing that this right-wing reasoning coincided on a number of points with pseudo-leftist views. These views held that the steps taken by the MSzMP and the Revolutionary Workers'-Peasants' Government to ensure the consistent development of democracy within the society, the elimination of consideration as to social origins in deciding on admissions to the universities, the appointment of non-party people as well to leading posts, etc., as concessions to the counter-revolution, as "social-democracy".

Both standpoints disregarded the actual historical facts and first of all the fact that the counter-revolution did not halt the building of socialism, but only interrupted its process. Following the defeat of the counter-revolution, the Revolutionary Workers' - Peasants' Government undertook the resumption of this work. Drawing the lessons from this experience, we could lay the foundations of socialism in a more effective way and within a shorter time, through the correction of errors, the creative application of Marxism-Leninism and through a conscious development of socialist democracy.

However, the counter-revolution played, in a sense, a "positive role", too, by exposing itself. More than any previous event, it shed light on the fatal consequences of nationalism, but also disclosed the necessity for a consistent break with sectarianism. Thus it accelerated the unhesitating development of the two-front struggle, which had become of vital importance for socialist revolution. This lesson was also reflected in the Declaration of the Moscow Conference of the Communist and Workers' Parties in 1957, which stressed the "necessity of resolutely overcoming revisionism and dogmatism in the ranks of communist and workers' parties".¹

Therefore, the source of the achievements of the decade 1956-1966 can only be found in the creative application of Marxism; in the elaboration of realistic economic policies which took into consideration the country's potential; in the consistent development of socialist democracy; in the selfless activity of the communists and the whole Hungarian people; in the regeneration of the Party; in the elimination of the mistakes that had accumulated and led to grave consequences from 1948 to 1956. However, the revelation of the errors began not after, but already before the defeat of the counter-revolution (November 4, 1956). The Leninist forces had already begun to correct the mistakes and not without some initial results. But the comprehensive development of a new line free from anti-Marxist distortions, and often even the implementation of certain correct resolutions, were still in the offing.

¹ Declaration adopted by the Conference of the Representatives of the Communist and Workers' Parties of the socialist countries, November 14-16, 1957. (Társadalmi Szemle, Nos. 7-8, 1957, p. 136.)

All this obviously is not meant to be a prejudiced, negative estimate of the first phase (from 1948 to 1956) of the building of socialism, though this period was burdened by grave contradictions. It was during this period that the foundations of socialism began to be laid. After the victory of workers' power we took important steps towards the eradication of the economic and cultural backwardness inherited from the old system. The elimination of the basic contradictions between capital and labour made possible the considerable progress in establishing a socialist industry and, even though grave mistakes were committed, we took the first steps toward leading our small-scale agriculture onto the road of socialism and to reducing the contradictions between city and village, between physical and intellectual labour. Therefore, the social and class structure already underwent a significant transformation between 1954 and 1956.

However, with the domination of the cult of personality and the spreading of dogmatism and subjectivism, the process of building socialism was distorted after 1948. It was laden with contradictions alien to Marxist-Leninist ideology. The suppression of the class enemy was not sufficiently effective, the measures taken against it often did not achieve their purpose. On the other hand socialist democracy was subjected to unjustified restrictions, the initial great activity of the working masses declined and socialist legality was gravely infringed upon. Serious disproportions arose in the national economy due to economic policies that failed to take into consideration Hungarian reality and which made a fetish of certain international experiences. From 1951 to 1953 the living standards of a large part of the toiling masses declined. As a result of the erroneous policies, ties between the Party leadership and membership, the Party and the working class, the working class and its allies deteriorated. The base of power, the alliance of workers and peasants slackened.

Obviously, the cult of personality and dogmatism are completely alien to Marxism. It is not our task here to explore the international roots of these negative phenomena nor to examine their international connotations. We have to remember, however, that since their development in Hungary was inseparable from the situation of the international communist movement at the time, the process of their elimination also started within the framework of international interactions.

In June 1953 the Central Leadership of the Hungarian Working People's Party (MDP) was forced to face reality, reveal the mistakes and take steps to correct them. It had to do so, on the one hand, because of the internal political, economic and social tension caused by the erroneous political line, and on the other hand because of the process of clarification that had begun within the international communist movement, first of all within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

The resolution adopted on this occasion, along with the conclusions that necessarily had to be drawn from the historic Twentieth Congress of the CPSU could have become a starting point for strengthening the dictatorship of the proletariat. This did not, however, occur. The post-1953 years saw further deterioration and distortion of the workers' power. The class enemy continually gained ground and 1956 became the most crucial year in the post-liberation history of our people and our Party.

The implementation of the important June 1953 and July 1956 resolutions of the Central Leadership of the MDP was impeded on the one hand by inconsistency and on the other hand by right-wing intrigues.² The unity of the leadership, one more apparent than real, disintegrated. The sectarian opposition tried desperately and blindly to obstruct the correction of errors and the elaboration and implementation of a correct Marxist-Leninist policy. Under the pretext of criticising the past, revisionism grew stronger and tried to turn the Party toward class treason, toward a right-wing, nationalist policy. In addition, the struggle for personal power further compounded this confused situation.

The enemies of socialism, within and without the country, would not have been true to themselves had they not utilized this situation. Open counter-revolution found natural allies in the right wing which attacked socialism with socialist slogans, while the discredited sectarian and dogmatic clique was unable to mobilize the masses for the defense of socialism.

An end was put to this situation in the autumn of 1956 by the ever more resolute stand of the Leninist forces. As the counter-revolution which broke out in October 1956 was crushed with the help of the Soviet Union, and as the MSzMP began to function, it became possible to continue the building of socialism free from subjectivism and left- or right-wing distortions.³

The history of the MSzMP, from the point of view of its basic principles, methods and style of work can be regarded as a new and homogeneous period of the Party's history. Its formation and the development of its activity put an end to the cult of personality and to the divisive internal party struggles. It opened a stage in the history of the Hungarian people's democracy which, due to the creative application of Marxism-Leninism, made possible a more effective and more rapid building of socialism. Thus, the period under review signified a radical break with the preceding one. *These ten years, reflecting the dialectics of historical development, preserved and at the same time transcended the characteristics of the previous period.* It was during these years that the Party achieved the correct goals set during the preceding years, and eliminated aspects which had been discredited by history and which had violated the historic laws of socialist construction, the generally applicable teachings of Marxism-Leninism. On the basis of the results achieved the MSzMP set, under new and complex circumstances, such goals which, if implemented, would ensure the achievement of socialism in our country and the creation of socialist national unity. It is from this that the significance of this decade is derived and it is this that determines its place in the history of people's democracy. And this is what makes it necessary for Hungarian historians to sum up the lessons to be drawn from it and to analyse its experiences.

² After June 1953, but especially after July 1956, the Hungarian Working People's Party, although burdened by contradictions and new negative aspects, was in a state of change. By overcoming dogmatism and revisionism, a more consistent application of the Leninist principles pertaining to the Party and the dictatorship of the proletariat began after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU.

³ The grave situation caused by the counter-revolutionary offensive required revolutionary decisions that could crush the counter-revolution and make it possible to continue socialist construction. These were taken when the Leninist-wing of the Party, lead by János Kádár, took the initiative, when the revolutionary forces established the leading bodies of the MSzMP and the Revolutionary Workers' - Peasants' Government and when armed struggle against the counter-revolution began with the assistance of the Soviet Union.

The history of the decade 1956-1966 comprises two stages of the socio-political struggle. More precisely, it includes the last phase of the struggle to lay the foundation of socialism and the first phase of the struggle for an advanced socialist society. Within these two phases three smaller periods can be distinguished:

The first period began on November 4, 1956 and ended in December 1958. The social struggles of this period were determined above all, by the need to defend and consolidate the workers' power, to continue the building of socialism and to prepare for the further development of social relations. Even a mere enumeration of the main problems clearly indicate that *in the first months of this period the questions of policy and power were in the centre of the class struggle, while in the second half economic and cultural tasks came to the fore.* Naturally these tasks could not be separated from each other and it only became possible to set further goals through their joint solutions.

The second period was that of the socialist reorganization of agriculture, during which *the principal issue of the socio-political struggles was the establishment of socialist relations of production in the whole of the national economy.* We carried out this revolutionary task from December 1958 until the spring of 1962.

Thus began the third period of the ten years under review which at the same time opened up a new stage in our history; to complete the building of socialism. In this period *the central task of the socio-political struggles is the consolidation and further development of socialist relations of production.*

The transition from one period to another was at the same time a decisive milestone in the development of our society. On the basis of what has been said so far we can point with more or less exactitude to the main landmarks, for in each period such concrete main tasks had to be solved without which further progress would have been impossible. The attitudes toward "details" were as a matter of course determined by the concrete historic situation and the main tasks flowing from it. The leadership of the Party had to solve or find new answers to innumerable questions that had already arisen in the practice of socialist construction. These answers, in other words, the elaboration of the Party's new Marxist-Leninist guidelines, could not be accomplished in one stroke. The position taken with regard to one or another issue necessarily changed and developed according to the dictates of the given historic situation.

We shall try, naturally only in broad terms to trace this development, keeping in mind the principal tasks of the separate periods. We shall keep in mind the basic methodological principle of our examination that there is no abstract truth. The positions taken by the leadership of the Party can be considered in their proper perspective and serve as a lesson for ourselves and for others only if viewed from the given historic situation.

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The first period of the ten years under review began on November 4, 1956 and ended in December 1958. The main features of the socio-political situation at the beginning of this period were the following: the counter-revolution had caused no substantial change in the status of the productive forces and certain changes occurred in social relations. In the villages the socialist sector of agriculture shrank,

the number of privately worked farms increased, thereby also altering class relations.⁴

The critical political situation, the ideological confusion and economic anarchy resulting from the counter-revolution made it vital for socialism to rally its forces to defend and consolidate workers' power and to restore the legal order of the People's Republic. The solution of these tasks was closely bound-up with the reorganization of the MSzMP, with the beginning and increasing of production, with putting economic policies and management on a new basis. The starting point for the solution of all these tasks was the clarification of the causes which led to the counter-revolution, an analysis of the role played by dogmatism and revisionism and by the external and internal enemy. This was done by the Provisional Central Committee of the MSzMP in its December 1956 resolution, hence its great ideological and political significance.

This resolution of the MSzMP indicated the causes of the counter-revolution – though on the basis of relatively limited factual material – in a way that has since been confirmed by history. It recapitulated in four points the sources of the counter-revolutionary uprising: the mistakes and incorrect methods of the former Party leadership; treason by Imre Nagy's group; the counter-revolutionary forces which had been organized by the capitalists and the big landowners abroad and at home; and finally the attack of international imperialism against socialism. These four factors were closely correlated and neither one nor the other can be omitted when making a scientific evaluation of the events. Nor can the sequence of these causes be regarded as accidental or arbitrary. Had the Party leadership under Rákosi not violated the historical laws of the building of socialism, had the unity of the Party not been disrupted because of its incorrect policies and with it the good relations that had been established between the Party and the masses, etc., then it might have been possible to prevent the other factors that had contributed to the outbreak of the counter-revolution.

This resolution became the ideological basis of the Party's organizational activity and helped to establish ideologico-political unity within the Party. The overwhelming majority of the members agreed with this resolution, and this was the precondition for an even more consistent ideological struggle against the revisionist and dogmatic views which had sought to disrupt the Party. The resolution gave a detailed analysis of the country's situation at the beginning of December and the tactics of the counter-revolutionary forces, it dealt with some basic principles of the Party's policies and examined the current tasks. *The significance of the resolution lay in the fact that it clearly pointed out that what had happened in Hungary was a counter-revolutionary uprising and that the MSzMP was a revolutionary, Marxist-Leninist Party, whose aim was to build socialism.* The resolution reflected the firm conviction that the Party and the working class were able to overcome the chaos rapidly to liquidate the counter-revolution completely and to continue strengthening the socialist system.

The resolution set the tasks of reorganizing the Party and ensuring its vanguard role. It introduced a new style of work when it pointed out *that the Party exercised its leading role in the life of the state and society not by giving orders but by a correct determination of goals and tasks and by the elaboration of a realistic policy, which*

⁴ See Péter Simon's study in this volume.

would advance the interests of the country, and through the self-sacrificing activity of the Party members. The communists had the task of serving and educating the masses. The new features in the method of party work were humanism, the autonomy of lower party organs, the unity of words and deeds and practicality.

One of the reasons for the rapid consolidation and further successes of the workers' power was the correct interpretation of the Leninist principle of proletarian dictatorship and its consistent application to the concrete Hungarian reality. A number of factors heightened the importance of this at that time.

During the years of the cult of the personality, the grave violations of socialist legality, the considerable restrictions on socialist democracy and the exaggerated centralism, the wide spread use of administrative methods between 1948 and 1953 deprived the masses, who were faithful to socialism – above all the working class – of the possibility to make appropriate use of their power and to develop it in the interest of progress and socialism. The distortion of the proletarian dictatorship gave rise to demagogic bourgeois and petty-bourgeois views about democracy being independent from class interests. This basically meant the negation of proletarian dictatorship, of revolutionary dictatorship and class struggle; it was aimed at disarming the working class and its allies and the liquidation of the socialist system. There were many people in our country who declared themselves to be supporters of socialism, but who did not have a clear conception of democracy and dictatorship.

The MSzMP's starting point was that democracy for the toiling masses could and had to be ensured under the given circumstances through the rigorous and consequent suppression of hostile elements,⁵ while the well-intentioned masses, who had been misled, had to be enlightened about the essence of proletarian dictatorship, about the relationship and dialectical unity of socialist democracy and revolutionary dictatorship.

The correct interpretation and application of the relationship between democracy and dictatorship was therefore a basic question of principle. The task was all the more complicated by the fact that the proletarian dictatorship had to be defended at the very time when the majority of the proletariat was passive, when *consciousness* and *interest* opposed each other to some extent. To the question as to whether this is at all possible, the obvious answer is provided by the very events in Hungary which proved that it is. Still, the question is not merely an academic

⁵ The counter-revolutionaries, who had penetrated the "workers' Councils" and the so-called "Revolutionary Committees", launched an all-out offensive in November 1956 against the proletarian power which was being reorganized. Their main weapon was to organize strikes to cripple the economic life of the country. The Central Workers' Council of Budapest, established during the counter-revolution, wanted to organize itself into an "opposition government". The Revolutionary Workers' - Peasants' Government gradually succeeded in frustrating these attempts. On November 12, 1956 the Government adopted a resolution forbidding the so-called revolutionary committees and other similar counter-revolutionary organizations from participating in the management of enterprises and on December 8 a government decree banned the activity of these organizations. The government dissolved the district "Workers' Councils" and, later on, the Central Workers' Council of Budapest. On January 29, 1957 the Provisional Executive Committee of the MSzMP adopted a resolution "On the establishment of an armed civil guard". On the basis of this decision the Presidential Council issued a decree in principle on the establishment of the *Workers' Militia* to protect the people's democratic state, to ensure a state of tranquillity for the working people, to have uninterrupted production and a more effective struggle against the attempts of the counter-revolutionary elements to restore capitalism.

one. This kind of a situation developed in Hungary under extremely peculiar historic circumstances. But the question in general, as to whether the dictatorship of the proletariat can be defended when the forces at the Party's disposal constitute a minority, was answered by Lenin in the affirmative with the stipulation that it depended on whether a majority could be assembled at the crucial points and at the decisive moment, and if subsequently, making use of the momentum gained during the break-through, mass support could be broadened. *It is possible to act on the basis of borrowed energies, but "cover" for this has to be immediately created.* The application of revolutionary dictatorship has to be accompanied by a constant development of socialist democracy and by the strengthening of socialist legality. Socialist legality is the practical implementation of the will of the working class and of the toiling masses, expressed in laws.

The Party leadership regarded the assertion of socialist legality not merely as an essential element of revolutionary dictatorship, but also as an important precondition for the development of proletarian democracy. As János Kádár has pointed out on a number of occasions, the defense of legality meant defending the interests of the people and of the proletarian dictatorship. The correct interpretation and practice of the dialectical unity of these two factors ensured the assertion of the rights of the working people, their greater participation in public life and made it possible to strengthen workers' power, to win the confidence of the people, to start and increase production, which had been disrupted, at a relatively rapid pace.

Today, many years after the counter-revolution, these ideas seem natural, but in the winter of 1956 and the spring of 1957 these principles had to be applied under extremely complex circumstances. It was a period when hostile and revisionist demagoguery took hold of even the honest masses, when imperialism also tried on an international scale to prevent these principles from being understood and put into practice. The situation was complicated also by the fact that there were manifestations of opportunism and liberalism in the struggle against the counter-revolution. The organs of the dictatorship did not always meet their obligations nor did they live up to expectations. In the given situation this violated socialist legality in no smaller degree than the previous abuses did.

In order to strengthen proletarian power it was especially necessary that the Party measures should not offend the masses' sense of justice, nor yield to their passing moods, but always bear in mind the real interest of the people. In the defence of workers' power it was necessary to take some measures which were not immediately understood by all, but which were essential to the interests of the working class. While carrying out these measures, the Party at times came up against some strata of the working class which had been disoriented by the counter-revolution, but class interests made the assumption of this responsibility necessary in the certain knowledge that their roads would soon meet.

The strengthening of workers' power and the suppression of the counter-revolution did not, therefore, require only military and administrative measures. Another task had to be simultaneously carried out which, in many ways, was even more important: *the enemy had to be politically isolated and the masses that had been under its influence, ideologically and politically disoriented, had to be won over to the cause of people's power.* The MSzMP was mindful of the Leninist principle that violence is necessary and justified only at certain moments

in the development of a revolution. *A much more profound, constant and characteristic feature of revolution is that it organizes and convinces the working masses.*

In the course of its reorganization, and the development of its method of work, the MSzMP based its policy and practice on Marxist principles about the leading role of the Party, its relationship with the masses and the alliance of the Party with non-party people. The starting point was that a minority of the working class and of the working people belonged to the Party and therefore its tasks could only be solved with the support of the masses and in their interests. As Lenin had said: "Among the people we are as a drop in the ocean, and we can administer only when we properly express what the people are conscious of. Unless we do this the Communist Party will not lead the proletariat, the proletariat will not lead the masses, and the whole machine will collapse."⁶

The Party, while asserting its leading role, regarded ideological and political activity as the forefront of its activity rather than administrative methods. At the same time it waged a two-front struggle. It fought against the sectarian views which held that the leading role of the Party would be ensured only if all leading posts would be filled by communists and which equated the leading role of the working class with the number of posts held by workers in the various leading bodies of the country. At the same time the MSzMP rejected the right-wing distortions which negated the leading role of the Party or demanded the restoration of a multi-party system.⁷ The starting point was the principle that the leading role of the Party and the working class is realized in the life of the state and of society when the policies of the Party which expresses the interests of the working class are put into practice, whether this be accomplished by Party members or not, by workers or by others. This new formulation by the Party regarding its relationship to the masses of non-party people was in complete harmony with Leninist teachings that the success of socialist construction depends on the stability of the alliance between the Party members and the non-party people.

The national Party Congress, held between June 27 and 29, 1957, set forth the plan for building socialism and its resolutions were an important start toward the consolidation of Party unity. The national Party Congress thoroughly examined the problem of the relationship between the Party and the masses, between Party and non-party-members. It declared that Party membership could not be the criterion for filling even the highest public posts, *but it is rather loyalty to the Hungarian People's Republic and to its Constitution, as well as personal ability and aptitude.* This statement expressed the new principles of the relation between the Party and the masses, but at the same time it safeguarded the Party's character

⁶ Lenin, V.I.: *Selected Works*, vol. II, p. 801, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1947.

⁷ As early as in the summer of 1956 the right wing demanded, ever more frequently, the return to a multi-party system. From October 23 to November 4, 1956 parties and groupings sprang up like mushrooms. In Budapest alone twenty-five parties were founded within less than two weeks. In the 4th district of the capital *seventy-two parties applied for licence to function.* It was from the ranks of these parties that the leaders of the counter-revolutionary armed struggle came, their programmes were extremely anti-Soviet and anti-communist and, despite their diversity, they had a uniform platform opposed to workers' power. No wonder then, that the Revolutionary Workers' - Peasants' Government did not permit the existence of these parties. Though it was a mistake in 1949 to artificially bring about the withering away of the parties of the government coalition which had supported the cause of socialism, in 1956 the demand for a multi-party system was a counter-revolutionary one which aimed at overthrowing the socialist system and not at correcting the errors of the past.

from dilution. In this field the Party had to and continues having to fight against those who fear for the leading role of the Party in its assertion of this Marxist principle and also against those who tried and are still trying to distort its practical application from a rightist position.

The significance of the national Congress stemmed from historical circumstances. At the time there already existed a strong Party (346,000 members), a united leadership and a correct political line. The first results of the consolidation and productive work were already evident, the confidence of the masses began to revive, ideological confusion began to disperse. The counter-attack of the revolutionary forces developed under extremely difficult circumstances in cultural and scientific life, but here, too, the first signs of consolidation were perceptible.

In such a situation it was of decisive importance that the national Congress had confirmed the political guideline outlined in the December resolution and the accepted evaluation of the counter-revolution; that it took a stand against those who had defended the erroneous policies of the previous years and that it elaborated the programme for the consolidation of proletarian dictatorship. In conformity with this, *economic, political and cultural issues came to the foreground of the socio-political struggles and of the class struggle.*

It became necessary for the Party to apply the generally valid teachings of Marxism-Leninism, regarding the policy of alliances, correctly to the Hungarian reality. As is well known, the reason for the change in the relations between the working class and its allies has generally to be looked for in the changes occurring in social and class relations. However, while examining the new features of the policy on alliances, following the counter-revolution, we nevertheless found the reasons elsewhere. *The changes in the Party's policy of alliance were not due to some kind of radical transformation of the social structure – though a certain structural shift had occurred as compared to 1948 – but first of all to the reexamination of previous erroneous concepts and to the requirements of the new situation.* After the counter-revolution, the MSzMP broke with the Stalinist theory that the class struggle was constantly and inevitably sharpening and rejected the one-sided interpretation of proletarian dictatorship, which relied on force and administrative measures. This had its impact on the development of the relations between the Party and the working class, the working class and the other classes and strata. The Party devoted great attention to the utmost possible satisfaction of the needs of the working class and the other working strata, to the assertion of material incentives, to political education, to convincing people. The changes were reflected in the fact that while hostile, counter-revolutionary actions were condemned by the Party and rigorously suppressed by the State, all law-abiding Hungarian citizens could find their place in society.

During the period that began at the end of 1956 significant changes took place in the system of economic management. The Provisional Central Committee of the MSzMP pointed out as early as the resolution of December 1956 that the government – with the help of the respective state organs and the best economists – had to elaborate an economic policy which could correspond to the new situation. It pointed out that this economic policy had to take into consideration all aspects of our economic potential and characteristics. The development of the national economy had to be based on the natural resources of the country while taking into consideration the advantages of international cooperation. Individual

initiative and professional knowledge had to be espoused. Material incentives had to be applied in all fields in the interests of the national economy, thus promoting technical development, improving quality, reducing production costs and increasing labour productivity. The importance of planning did not diminish but its sphere of activity was changed and it had to be centered on the correct delineation of the main areas of the national economy and on the intensiveness of its general development. Greater opportunity had to be provided for the development of the private sector, which in previous years had been restricted to an unnecessary degree, where it did not jeopardize the building of socialism.

The December resolution pointed out that the gradual improvement in the living standard of the working people should be the main issue of our whole economic policy, when considering the distribution of the national income and preparing economic and investment plans. As the Government's declaration of January 6, 1957 stated, the central directives had to be asserted in the most important matters, while greater autonomy had to be accorded to the enterprises and, in the management of local industries, to local councils. The leadership wanted to achieve the planned management of agriculture first of all by such economic and political measures which would provide material incentives to the producers and by correcting the errors of the former price system, rather than by central interference in every detail.

What were the main measures aimed at developing the system of economic management?

Economic methods were given greater play in industry management. In accord with the Party resolution and the government's declaration some changes were made in the system of planning as early as 1957 and the number of obligatory planning index figures was reduced. Cabinet ministers were not bound by the former rigid system of index figures, and could set the tasks in such index figures which would correspond to the peculiarities of the trades within the individual industrial branches. The development of the planning system in 1957 was a concrete step towards the better coordination between production and needs. The perfection of the planning system contributed to the fact that major consideration was given to economizing, efficiency, input and output.

Significant changes took place in the field of material incentives as well. The profit-sharing system was introduced with the result that in 1958 alone almost one milliard forints were paid out. This system played an important role in enforcing the concept of economizing and profitability. *This was a significant step from the theoretical point of view as well, for it proved that the profit category, now given prominence, was compatible with a planned economy.*

The implementation of the decisions regarding wages and labour, made between 1957 to 1959, was also important from the point of view of the development of the national economy. The piecework system, formerly rigidly applied, was replaced by the introduction of a degressive system of wages according to results, by types of task wages based on the classification of individual workers, etc. In itself, the application of the differentiated forms of wage payment reduced incentives to merely increase quantity and led to an improvement of the quality of industrial products.

Measures were also taken in order to extend the NEP (New Economic Policy) worked out by Lenin, to be applied to cities and villages alike *in conformity with*

Hungarian conditions. In previous years small artisan undertakings had been unjustifiably restricted or partially eliminated. The new measures favoured first of all the artisans and small shop-keepers, who directly served the population. The peasants had to be given financial incentives in the interest of developing agricultural production and increasing their productivity. Compulsory delivery of produce to the state was abolished in agriculture and the system of free marketing was introduced. On this basis a new and uniform system of agricultural prices came into force, creating the incentive for the peasants to increase agricultural production. *This was not merely an economic tactic, but, at the time, also one of the most important preconditions for strengthening the policy of alliances, and above all of the base of the proletarian dictatorship, the alliance between workers and peasants.*

A number of other important decisions also served to develop the vested interests of the individually working peasants.⁸ The Revolutionary Workers' – Peasants' Government did not abandon the *socialist reorganization of agriculture.*

This aim, however, was relegated to the background in this period because of the necessity to defend and stabilize proletarian power, and because of the urgency to increase production and to satisfy the needs of the population to the greatest possible degree.

These measures were welcomed by the individually working peasants and the quantity of surplus goods on the market increased significantly, supplies improved and there was a boom in agricultural production. However, these correct and necessary measures of the government inevitably gave rise to certain contradictions. In the first half of 1957 some tensions developed because of the gap between the substantial increase in the income of the individually working peasants and the amount of available consumer goods, because the increased spending capacity also of the working class was not met by increased production.⁹ The purchase of land was permitted¹⁰ within certain limits and the increased incomes of the individual peasants, besides stimulating production, also strengthened the small-holder mentality and attitude. Differences arose temporarily between individually working peasants and those in cooperatives, especially between the peasants who had remained in and those who had withdrawn from the cooperative farms. This obstructed for a time the rejoining of those who had left the cooperatives but had now changed their minds.

The leadership of the MSzMP took note of these differences. In this period, however, the central task of the class struggle was not that of further developing the cooperative movement, but of defending and consolidating the workers' power. The Party leadership was of the opinion that if the working peasantry would support the Party, if the Party would make good the harm which had been

⁸ Apart from the abolition of the compulsory delivery of produce, the elimination of the forced reshuffling of plots served to increase the material interest of the individually working peasants, their economic support and the security of production. The special charges for agricultural development and obligatory fire and ice insurance were also abolished. The new marketing and price system meant using the law of value influencing production.

⁹ Due to the measures on wages and labour in the first quarter of 1957 the average wage of industrial workers increased by 25 per cent as compared to the first quarter of 1956. During the same period industrial production decreased by about 18 per cent.

¹⁰ In order to ensure the most intensive possible exploitation of arable lands, the government authorized the purchase of land within the limit of 3 hectares and indicated the maximum land that may be privately owned to be 11.5–14.5 hectares.

caused in the past and defend the peasants against the common class enemy, the peasants' confidence in the Party would be increased. Thus the conditions would also be brought about for the acceleration of the socialist reorganization of agriculture with the active participation of the peasants. Therefore, despite the differences, as events later proved, the agrarian policies of the MSzMP laid the foundations for strengthening the alliance between workers and peasants, between the working class and other working strata and made it possible to restore good relations between the Party and the masses and to consolidate workers' power. Thus conditions ripened for the acceleration of the building of socialism in all fields.

The results of this well-considered and scientifically prepared policy and the economic guidelines were apparent within a short time. By the end of 1957 the national economy had been reconstructed, production reached and the living standards of working people surpassed the 1955 level.

In 1958 the fulfillment of the Three Year Plan began. The Plan's main goal was the modest and gradual further development of the living standards that had been reached, while bearing in mind our economic capacities. The Plan aimed to stabilize the balance of payments and to meet eventual obligations in this field. It reflected the recognition that possibilities for extensive economic expansion were considerably worse, making it necessary to seek new avenues of development.

In 1958, the first year of the Three Year Plan, industry and the building industry produced, based on then current prices, 65.9 per cent of the gross national product, and 61.9 per cent of the national income. Agriculture contributed 28 per cent to the national product and 32.1 per cent to the national income. This and subsequent developments were largely due to the increased pace of industrial growth. Thus larger sums than had originally been planned could be allocated to increase accumulation and consumption, and work was started on some tasks set out in the Plan the execution of which had been set for a later period. By the end of 1958 conditions were ripe for accelerating the pace of socialist transformation in agriculture. These two concurrent facts considerably influenced not only the extent of development, but also its inner content and proportions, with the result that *the building of socialism was already accelerated during the period of the Three Year Plan.*

This rapid development was largely due to the economic successes achieved by the socialist countries, first of all by the Soviet Union. These successes made it possible to extend international cooperation and trade with the socialist countries and to obtain material goods indispensable to the development of our national economy.

The results, that the West referred to as a new "Hungarian miracle" were to a great extent due to the consistent internationalist policy of the MSzMP and its well known two-front struggle in ideology and politics. Besides the Party resolutions of an ideological character, this was a period of such important documents as the guidelines on cultural policy,¹¹ which evaluated the great cultural achieve-

¹¹ *Az MSzMP Művelődéspolitikai Irányelvei 1958 Július 25* (The Guidelines of the MSzMP on Cultural Policy, July 25, 1958), *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1956–1962* (Resolutions and Documents of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party 1956–1962), pp. 231–260, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1964.

ments of the post-Liberation period, but also noted the mistakes and set the tasks for the future. This document called attention first of all to the importance of education in world outlook, the dissemination of Marxist ideology and the ideological struggle against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois views. Starting with the economic and ideological tasks of socialism, the document analyzed the role of science in socialist society and the necessity to reform public education. Examining the results, the situation and further tasks of our educational system, the guidelines outlined the important principles and concrete measures serving the further development of public education. As for the arts, the guidelines advocated socialist realism, but also gave leeway to other realist expressions. They rejected all decadent manifestations and bourgeois or petty-bourgeois formalism in literature and the arts. The resolution pinpointed ideological influence as the main method of guidance, but charged the state organs with curbing that which is negative and harmful and with negating that which is hostile. Therefore, it stressed that administrative measures were also necessary and justified against destructive works and those of no artistic value. A significant ideological contribution to the struggle against nationalism and "third road" ideas and to the revitalization of literary life was given by the Party documents on "Populist Writers"¹² and by the lectures of the Party leaders at the Political Academy of the MSzMP on current theoretical and political issues. In these lectures one or the other of the important areas of the building of socialism were analysed, taking into account the experiences of other fraternal parties. The lecturers openly faced the mistakes that had characterized the activity of the Party in the past and indicated the place and the role of ideological work in the given period of socialist construction.

The consistent ideological activity of the Party greatly encouraged workers in the ideological, cultural and scientific fields. Comprehensive discussions developed in economics, philosophy, historiography, literature and the arts. These helped to overcome the different erroneous views, they contributed toward the elaboration of the problems which arose in the course of the building of socialism, they revealed the true role and historic and social roots of dogmatism and revisionism. They proved that one of the principal preconditions of an effective struggle against revisionism was the surmounting of dogmatism and sectarianism. These discussions were useful because they led to a clear formulation of the conceptions, proposals and positive endeavours applying and enriching Marxism-Leninism under Hungarian conditions.

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After the consolidation of the proletarian dictatorship and economic life, the need to accelerate the tempo of building socialism came to the fore at the end of 1958. The establishment of socialist relations of production in the whole of the national economy became the principal issue of the socio-political struggles. The Party and the working class necessarily had to face new tasks. The most important one was to continue and to accelerate the socialist reorganization of agriculture.¹³

¹² Az MSzMP KB Kulturális Elméleti Munkaközösségének állásfoglalása a "Népi Írókról" (The Position of the Cultural and Theoretical Task Force of the Central Committee of the MSzMP on the "Populist Writers"), (June 1958), *ibid.*, pp. 196–223.

¹³ The problems of the socialist reorganization of agriculture are analyzed in detail in Péter Simon's study.

Why did the continuation and acceleration of the socialist reorganization of agriculture become indispensable? First of all because industry, transport and trade were already mainly socialist in character, therefore the working class – and practically the whole of the non-agricultural population – was working in the socialist sector. At the same time small-scale production still dominated in agriculture and the overwhelming majority of the peasantry was still bound to small properties. A sharp contradiction had developed between the standards of industrial and agricultural production and this had an impact on the development of the whole national economy. Obviously, this contradiction would not have become so acute in the second half of the fifties, had the Hungarian Working People's Party followed a Leninist agrarian policy. Be that as it may, the fact is that between 1950 and 1957 industrial production had doubled, while agricultural output only increased by 20 per cent, though this was also due to an erroneous investments policy. This concrete situation had to be faced by the Party as soon as our political and economic life had been consolidated.

The building of socialism was – and still is – going on not in a state of isolation, but in struggle with international imperialism and in correlation with the building of socialism in other countries. After its 1956 offensive against the socialist world system and the national liberation movements, imperialism was increasingly on the military and political defensive, its cold war, moreover, its "warm war" policies had suffered a severe set back. *In the international arena it was the peaceful economic competition of the two world systems that came into the foreground of the international struggles.* Along with the other socialist countries Hungary also had to take part in this struggle. Our economic development, however, required, in addition to the further development of industry, the stepping-up of agricultural production and also because of this, the development of large scale socialist agriculture.

The consolidation within the country and the changes in the international situation created incomparably more favourable political conditions for the further socialist transformation of agriculture than ever before during the development of the Hungarian people's democracy.

In the socialist reorganization of agriculture the Party – creatively applying the teachings of Marxism-Leninism – drew upon the experiences of the other socialist countries, keeping in mind the specific Hungarian situation. In this spirit it analysed the interaction of economic and political conditions of the given situation and defined the basic principles of the reorganization. The resolution adopted by the Central Committee of the MSzMP on December 7, 1958 stated that the main principles of the reorganization were identical everywhere. *The basic precondition was the assertion of the dictatorship of the proletariat and of the leading role of the Party and the continued strengthening of the worker-peasant alliance.* Another condition was extensive support from the socialist state and the development of socialist industry. It had to be constantly kept in mind that *this complicated historic task could only be carried out with the participation and agreement of the working peasantry and by making membership attractive by assuring them of material benefits.* The technical base of this transformation everywhere was a modern and rapidly developing technology, the technical, organizational and political function of the machine stations previously established by the state, and the rapid spreading of mechanisation. The socialist transforma-

tion of agriculture had to be carried out everywhere in a struggle against the class enemy. The idea of cooperative farming did not take hold simultaneously in all strata of the peasantry, on the contrary, differences may have arisen in the various parts of the countryside stemming from local peculiarities.

This work not only required overcoming the class enemy and conservatism, but also the various left and right-wing views, even within the Central Committee of the Party.

The Central Committee of the MSzMP pointed out that the success of this transformation depended first of all on the people, that is, on the peasantry itself, and on the working class promoting the reorganization both by political and economic means. The socialist reorganization of agriculture was a basic concern of our society and therefore the solution of this task was a social and political matter and, as such, one of concern to the whole movement.

Naturally, economic conditions were of no lesser importance. However, these conditions either had already been partly established or were maturing in the course of carrying out this work along with the formation of the cooperative farms. The solution of this task had to be prepared for economically, too. The development and extension of the cooperative movement, and the stabilization of the cooperative farms merged into an indivisible task.

In the course of the transformation a number of objective and subjective obstacles had to be reckoned with which could have caused temporary difficulties in production. This task had to be carried out, however, in such a way as to avoid a drop in output and to ensure a gradual expansion. Thus a "dual task" had to be solved.

The directives of the MSzMP emphasized that *the principle of voluntary association had to be strictly observed*, which, however, was not to be equated with spontaneity. The Party opposed the application of administrative pressure as an organizational method so that enrolling in the cooperatives had to be a voluntary act by the peasants. Under certain circumstances members were granted the right to withdraw from the cooperative farms. At the same time the Party also pointed out that free association did not exclude the carrying on of propaganda among the peasants providing this was done properly, since this was an indispensable precondition of reorganization.

At the given period in the socialist transformation of agriculture the producers' cooperative was the main form of effectuating the principle of gradualness and represented most consistently and comprehensively the criteria of socialist relations of production. The fundamental character of the whole reorganization was thus determined by the fact that the existing cooperatives were primarily of type 3¹⁴ and these constituted the main basis for reorganization.

¹⁴ In contrast to lower forms of cooperative farms, the peasants who joined type 3 cooperatives brought with them their land (except for the 0.3 to 0.6 hectares that was allowed for household farming), draught animals, beef cattle (except those authorized for household use), farm buildings not within the household plot and exceeding its limits. Depending on the decision of the cooperative membership, 20 to 35 per cent of the draught animals, cattle and equipment given into the common property had to be added to the nondivisible cooperative fund and the rest had to be paid back to the members.

This fact also influenced the peasants in their selection of the type of cooperative farm they chose to join. But where conditions were not favourable for the organization of type 3 cooperatives, other types were formed.

The principle of material incentives was consistently adhered to. Besides the obligatory payment of land rent and the extension of state subsidies other important measures were also taken. These measures included retirement and old-age-pensions to the peasants, the increased role of household farming, as well as the right of the cooperatives to define – on the basis of the principles laid down in the Cooperative Act – their own statutes, while guidance from the state was primarily exercised with the aid of economic measures.

As a result of the Marxist-Leninist agrarian policy, the application of correct methods and the support of the working class, the reorganization of agriculture proceeded at a faster pace than had been expected, and was essentially completed in 1961. In the first quarter of that year 93.2 per cent of the country's arable land already belonged to the socialist sector, and 91 per cent of the peasants worked on cooperative farms.¹⁵

A uniform socialist economic base had been created for the national economy. Socialist relations of production were established in the villages as well in the cities. The preconditions had been brought about for the gradual elimination of the contradictions between socialist industry, the socialist system and small scale farming. Conditions had also been created for the gradual diminution of the contradiction between growing social needs and backward agricultural production. These two contradictions were inseparable in means and time even if the development of commodity production was, even amidst the new conditions, slow and gradual, and only gained full impetus later on.

The socialist reorganization of agriculture, and thus the laying of the foundations of socialism meant the transformation of the economic structure of our country and a radical change in the class structure of our society.¹⁶ The changes in objective conditions had an impact on all classes and social strata of our people,

¹⁵ In the period that followed the counter-revolution the socialist reorganization of agriculture was accomplished in three stages. In the first stage – from 1958 to the spring of 1959 – the centre of gravity of the transformation was confined to a few counties where farming was more intensive. In these counties the higher form of cooperatives prevailed composed mostly of small and middle peasants. The greatest development took place in the second stage, from 1959 to 1960. At this time, masses of peasants joined mainly the already existing coops and thus the average area of the cooperative farms increased. In the third stage – in 1960–1961 – the reorganization extended to such areas where the cultivation of specific crops, grapes and fruits or peculiar natural and economic conditions required particular solutions. See Péter Simon's study in this volume.

¹⁶ Employment in percentages of major occupation groups in 1949 and 1962:

	1949	1962
Total outside agriculture	44.8 per cent	63.4 per cent
Total within agriculture	55.2 per cent	36.6 per cent
of these smallholders	54.6 per cent	4.6 per cent
of these cooperative farmers	0.6 per cent	32.0 per cent

Munkügyi Adattár 1949–1966 (Labour Statistics 1949–1966), p. 198, Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, Budapest, 1968.

changing, accordingly, their relations to each other too. We eliminated forever the exploiting classes and socialist relations of productions dominate in all sectors of the economy. In 1962, 94.4 per cent of the working population was employed in state and cooperative sectors, while only 4.6 per cent were privately employed. Thus the material situation and wellbeing of the overwhelming majority of the population was directly linked to the strengthening of socialist economy. All social strata and classes became objectively interested in the full unfolding of the socialist development in our society. The socialist reorganization of agriculture was, therefore, an event of revolutionary importance in the history of our country, which

1. *Considering its social importance:* eliminated once and for all the possibility of exploitation and the economic basis of the restoration of capitalism in Hungary;

2. *Considering its political importance:* established large-scale socialist farming as the economic base for the formation of a new, socialist peasantry and gave new content to all alliance between the working class and peasantry;

3. *Considering its economic importance:* created the conditions for a more rapid development of the national economy as a whole, which also required a more accelerated rise in agricultural production. Because of the former, more backward relations of production this source was being exhausted. The systematic increase in agricultural production was one way of meeting the growing needs of industry for raw material and for the improvement of our balance of foreign trade.

The new situation, the rapid development of the cooperative movement, made it also necessary for the Party to define its policy of alliances, keeping in mind the changes that had taken place within the peasantry. As is known, in the first years of the proletarian revolution not only the urban bourgeoisie but also the rural detachment of the bourgeoisie, the kulaks, had been economically liquidated in our country, though the exaggerated application of administrative methods caused grave harm. At the time of the counter-revolution in 1956 the kulaks were already small in number. In 1958, before the large-scale reorganization began, only 1.3 per cent of the 1,366,389 private farms, that is 3,840 units had more than 14.4 hectares. One part of the former kulaks had by then been working as industrial workers for almost ten years and had lost touch with the villages. The majority of the kulaks who remained in the villages had become working peasants in terms of their economic situation and politically had to relinquish all hope of ever regaining their former social position.

Historic conditions made it possible and necessary to apply different means and methods of the class struggle toward the kulaks than those that had earlier been used by the Soviet Union or in our country by the leadership of the Hungarian Working People's Party, in the first years after the liberation. Amidst these conditions the Party declared that it depended on the peasants in the cooperatives whether or not the former kulaks should be admitted. The only condition was that they become full members only after proving their worth with two years of honest work.

The former economic basis of the class structure in the villages was abolished. Therefore it would have been a grave error to apply the Leninist teachings in the old way. After the socialist reorganization of agriculture the goal was to create a homogeneous peasantry and to liquidate all remnants of class stratification. That

is why the Eighth Congress of the MSzMP declared in November 1962: "In the cooperatives, too, the socialist principle has to be that the members be judged and remunerated not according to their former class position, but their participation, firmness and merits in the common work."¹⁷ The Party fought against all views and practices that might lead to a sharpening of differences in the new cooperative farms and in certain strata of the peasantry in general. It also condemned all efforts which – as in the question of land rent – sought a unilateral assertion of the rights of the former landowners, and also fought against views which tried to make the payment of the land rent, guaranteed by law, questionable, or demanded this payment to be eliminated.

The new situation that emerged as the foundations of socialism were being laid, enriched the Party's policy on alliances. The new elements were summarized by the Eighth Congress and became known as the policy of socialist national unity. What were these new elements?

The first relates to the purpose of cooperation, the second to the extent of this cooperation. As to the first one: the alliance now had the aim of achieving a higher goal than ever before, that of completing the building of socialism. As to the second: it has to be pointed out that the alliance encompassed – for the first time – all classes and strata of our society. The changes which occurred in class relations as well as the new elements, which emerged within the base and the direct goal of national unity, raised, in a new way, the problem of dealing with social origins, which was reflected, first of all, in the fact that considerations of the social origins of young people applying for admission to schools of higher learning were abolished.

While stressing the new elements in the policy on alliances, it has to be pointed out that the MSzMP's policy of national unity is not a radically new one. It is in its basic principles – discounting the period between 1949 to 1956 – an organic continuation and consummation of the policy of the united national front elaborated and applied in practice by the communist party during the war in the course of the anti-fascist struggle for independence.

In the period under survey the bases of socialism were extended not only in the villages but in all spheres of our social life. It is perhaps the most characteristic feature of cultural development that with the socialist reorganization of agriculture not only bourgeois ideology but petty-bourgeois ideology was also defeated. It became evident that socialism could win the masses not only in the questions of political power, but also on the economic front, and even such people who had been linked to small-scale production out of habit and by many aspects of their economic interests.

The socialist reorganization of agriculture opened new avenues of activity to the peasantry and to Hungarian society as a whole. The way was opened to a technical and technological transformation of agriculture, to the transformation of the cultural, economic and political conditions, and to changing the thinking of the peasants. At the same time tasks emerged during and after the transformation.

¹⁷ A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt VIII. kongresszusának jegyzőkönyve (The Minutes of the Eighth Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party), p. 34, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1963.

Above all the "dual task" had to be solved, and this was a very important economic-political necessity. The achievement of this goal can be considered as one of the greatest results of the reorganization, that is, that agricultural production not only did not decrease but, on the contrary, increased its output to some extent. This was a tremendous achievement. However, after the reorganization, production increased at a slower pace than had been expected. This was due to a number of factors. *The age-old traditions of millions of people are a formidable force, the replacement of the old way of life by the new is not accomplished without shocks.* These changes, despite the relatively favourable internal and external conditions, temporarily reduced the labour zeal of a part of the peasantry and disrupted for a time their usual diligence. The solution of the tasks was made all the more difficult because the management and organization of work in the new large-scale cooperatives took time, while large investments and much time were also needed to obtain technical equipment.

The expectations of a rapid increase in production were therefore unrealistic. Besides the unfavourable weather, this also contributed to the fact that agricultural production only increased by 10 per cent during the second five year plan, instead of the planned 22–23 per cent. It must not be forgotten, however, that this was accompanied by a 40–45 per cent increase in productivity, and that production for the market increased to a larger extent than production in general.¹⁸

The other task was to solve the lack of manpower which resulted from the exodus of the young peasants to urban areas. This is a world wide phenomenon and has been the source of labour power for industry all over the world for ages. In our country, this process was accelerated by the organization of the cooperatives and it has not ended yet. This problem can only be solved by attaining higher technical standards and by the mechanization of production. The greatest difficulty has been caused by the fact that mechanization was unable to keep pace with the migration of peasants to the cities and with the ageing of the rural population (in 1965 the average age of the peasants in the cooperatives was fifty-four years).

The third task was to establish the technological material base for large-scale farming. Within a historically very short time, within five years, agriculture required ever increasing investments. This was necessitated by the fact that the means of production previously used on the small private farms were useless on the cooperative farms and because of the migration of manpower to the town. The investments, naturally, were not wasted, sooner or later they would have been needed but at the moment they overtaxed the national economy. The experiences following the organization of the cooperatives showed that the attainment of the technological-material base of modern large-scale farming required more time than had been estimated.¹⁹

But these problems take us into a new period which still exists.

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¹⁸ The net volume of commodity deliveries increased by 19 per cent from 1961 to 1965. This was one of the most expressive results of cooperative farming.

¹⁹ The amount of state investments allocated to agriculture was higher in Hungary than the average in the socialist countries: 19 per cent of the Second Five Year Plan investments was devoted to agriculture (38,680 milliard *forints* from 1961 to 1965). This was necessary, however, so that the technological-material basis could be laid. Hungarian agriculture needed eighty-six milliard *forints* for construction but only eighteen thousand millions could be allocated for this purpose by the end of 1965. Eight to ten thousand tractors were needed each year alone in order to replace the old ones and to increase the stock.

In November 1962 the Eighth Congress of the MSzMP analysed the activity of the Party since the counter-revolution and set the tasks, the solution of which would create the foundation for further development. The national economy had become homogeneous, the foundations of socialism had been laid and the stage of its completion begun. Thus began a new period in our history. While prior to this the main task was to bring about socialist social relations, after 1962 these relations had to be stabilized and further developed. Socialist construction continued to embrace three closely connected elements. These were: the development of the technological-material base of socialism; the full development and consolidation of socialist social relations; the development of sciences and the deepening of the cultural revolution.

The development of the technological-material base of socialism was one of the important tasks of the Second Five Year Plan that began in 1961. The average annual increase in national income during the Second Five Year Plan was 4.6 per cent. The national income in 1965 was 175 milliard *forints*, surpassing that of 1960 by 25 per cent. This increase made it possible to improve the living conditions of the population and at the same time to increase the fixed capital. During these five years net industrial production increased by 44 per cent. Agricultural production, though operating with a significantly diminishing labour force, increased by 10 per cent, which indicated an appreciable increase in productivity.²⁰

During the Second Five Year Plan consumption increased by 21 per cent, while real income per capita rose by 22 per cent as compared to the previous five year period. Allocations for social purposes grew at an even faster pace, at the rate of 35 per cent per capita. As income rose faster than consumption, the population's bank deposits increased substantially, by 120 per cent during the 1960–1965 period. However, despite the results in production and living standards, it became evident already during this period that regarding the possibilities of extensive development we hardly had any reserves, and the tasks of intensive development had to be given prominence even to a greater degree than in the previous stage. The rate of growth in national income decreased in comparison with the previous period. Since agricultural production failed to reach the planned level, national income only increased during these five years by 25 per cent instead of the envisaged 36 per cent. The contribution of industry to the national income was also less than expected, because we were unable to reduce production costs to the extent planned. During the Three Year Plan the labour force increased by 3 per cent in the productive branches of the national economy and this also contributed to the fact that the average annual increase in national income was 7.8 per cent. This source played no role during the Second Five Year Plan, when the annual increase of the national income averaged 4.6 per cent. Thus the only way of development was, especially after 1965, that of increasing productivity. A more rapid increase in productivity was an indispensable factor in the completion of the building of socialism.

²⁰ From 1961 to 1965 the active earners in agriculture decreased by 400,000; the per capita value of gross production increased by 26.1 per cent.

An unfavourable concomitant of the growth of industrial production was also that a good part of production did not correspond to demand and therefore swelled the stocks. From 1961 the yearly increase of circulating funds comprised more than 10 per cent of the national income and these funds reached about two-hundred milliard *forints* by the end of 1963. This unsound increase in circulating funds within the accumulated funds not only reflected the difficulties that had emerged, but sooner or later also had to become a source of further ones.

These problems led to the December 1964 resolution of the Central Committee of the MSzMP and it was the recognition of these problems that motivated the reform of the mechanism of economic management.²¹

Some people were of the opinion that the reform should have been introduced sooner because the previous changes in the system of economic management – and partly in economic policies – were merely patchwork. However, the situation that emerged after 1956 can only be understood and judged correctly if viewed from a historic point of view and examined objectively as a process. It would have been impossible to recognize and explore the extremely complex new questions from one day to the other. Cognition is a process that has different phases. Apart from the measures of 1957 which served the further development of the system of economic management, a large part in working out the reform was played by the domestic experiences since December 1964, by the problems which emerged in the course of international cooperation and the experiences of other socialist countries.

The system of economic management, as everything else in life, is subject to the laws of development and change. The difference between socialist society and its historic predecessors – and it is also its great advantage – lies in the very fact that the former is able, with a high degree of consciousness, to raise socio-economic relations to the level of historic requirements. It is able, in conformity with the development of the forces of production, to modernize and develop all those methods of economic management which have proved to be good and able to withstand the pressure of time and to eliminate all that are out-moded and therefore prevent the realization of our goals. This was exactly the case when contradictions arose between the creative activity of the working masses and the obsolescence of the old system of economic management as well as between the need for increased application of the law of value and the system of too detailed directives. This had a negative impact both on production and on living standards.

²¹ During the preparation of the new system of economic management and since then, several books have been published about the new mechanism and the different spheres of the machinery of economic management. Among these, the *Az új gazdasági mechanizmus gyakorlata* (The Practice of the New Economic Mechanism) and *Az új gazdasági mechanizmus gyakorlata a mezőgazdaságban* (The Practice of the New Economic Mechanism in Agriculture) deserve special attention, as they provide scientifically based information about almost all professional, organizational and management issues of this important change in economic policies. A comprehensive view is given of the problem by Rezső Nyers' *Gazdaságpolitikánk és a gazdasági mechanizmus reformja* (Our Economic Policies and the Reform of the Economic Mechanism) (Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1968), as well as by the manual *A népgazdaság irányítási rendszere* (The System of Management of National Economy).

It is therefore unhistorical to raise the question as to why the radical reform of the system of economic management had not been considered in 1957. There is no need to detail the situation that prevailed in Hungary and abroad after the counter-revolution, which made such a radical transformation of the system of economic management as the present one unrealistic. Nor did the political and economic conditions and the present level of international cooperation, so important an element for the implementation of the reform, exist. But what were the factors that made the introduction of the reform necessary at the given period?

First of all the large qualitative and quantitative change in the forces of production. The whole structure of national economy had been transformed, a relatively modern industry had been created, significant changes had taken place in the structure of the forces of production in agriculture, there was greater specialization and division of labour.

Along with the development of the forces of production a great change had taken place in our relations of production. The socialist reorganization of agriculture put an end to the sectionalization of our national economy and established a uniform socialist base for the national economy.

The extensive reserves of the previously important sources of economic expansion were being exhausted. It was only possible to meet domestic and international conditions and make substantial progress, by a more intensive exploration of the inner reserves of the economy, first of all by accelerating technical progress and increasing more rapidly the productivity of labour. The development of the forces of production put qualitatively new demands on the extension of the international division of labour and international cooperation.

The system of management evolved during the reform was based on firm socialist relations of production, on the socialist state and cooperative-owned means of production. Therefore it was not only necessary but also realistic to put its further development on the agenda. It was made realistic by the favourable conditions emerging in economic and social relations and in our international relations, while it was made necessary by the contradiction arising between the former system of economic management and objective conditions. This contradiction slowed down the rate of economic expansion and the growth of living standards. Therefore it was of prime economic and political importance to harmonize the system of economic management with the new conditions and with the new tasks that had come to the fore. This could in the long run also ensure a more rapid and balanced development, eliminating at the same time the sources of the mistakes that had their origin in the former system of economic management.

The reform was not an economic task in the narrow sense but a broader socio-political one as well, encompassing the development of socialist democracy. It is largely based upon those reserves which spring from the initiative of the people and thus stimulate creative work, increase individual responsibility and democracy. The unfolding of factory democracy makes it possible for the workers to more readily concern themselves with the process of production, and establishes more favourable conditions for harmonizing individual with social interests.

The reform, despite the new ideas and conceptions it contains, is not unprecedented in our history. It is a direct continuation of the changes that had been taking place since 1957. It has brought our economic policies to a qualitatively

higher stage and made it possible to make even better use of our economic resources. Therefore it has accelerated our progress toward socialism and toward completing the building of socialism.²²

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It is of fundamental importance from the point of view of stabilizing the achievements and completing the building of socialism, that socialist ideals and culture be widely spread and for the socialist world outlook to prevail in all spheres of social life. By establishing a homogeneous socialist base in the national economy, we brought about the objective conditions for socialist national unity. Its consolidation is, however, a long process that requires the solution of a number of tasks. It is especially important also from this point of view to examine the social stratification, and above all to examine the material, political, cultural situation and the outlook of the working class.

Technological-material and scientific-cultural conditions mature unevenly and therefore cannot be transformed nor developed together and simultaneously. This means that contradictions temporarily emerge and have to be gradually eliminated as new scientific and material conditions and new social conditions are brought about.

It is therefore essential to define clearly the main content of social development. This can be summed up in the fact that while during the period of laying the foundations of socialism the main task of the working class was to replace bourgeois and small-scale production relations with socialist relations, in the period of completing the building of socialism the most important task is to replace still undeveloped socialist relations by those more developed. While until 1962 the formation of new socialist relations depended mainly on the elimination of capitalist and small-producer relations, the situation has changed since the transformation of agriculture and the development of new, socialist relations is a precondition for the elimination of the remnants of the non-socialist relations. The transformation in the outlook of the people is a long and contradictory process. It can be slowed down or accelerated by developments at home and abroad. However, it is also useful to indicate that the non-socialist features of consciousness and attitudes are basically due to two factors: to the as yet non-socialist features of economic, political and legal relations, and to the relative maturity of the already dominating socialist relations. These are inevitable concomitants of the period of transition.

²² We shall not deal here with the tasks which have arisen since the introduction on January 1, 1968 of the economic reform and in the course of its implementation. We should like only to indicate that the introduction and successful implementation of the reform called for stable economic conditions. It was of basic importance to achieve the goals of the Third Five Year Plan, the results of the first year of which already reflected the positive effects of the measures taken. In 1966 the national income increased by 6 per cent instead of the planned 4 per cent, while in 1967 by 8 per cent, and in the same year the increase in consumption was 6 per cent, the increase in accumulation reached 26 per cent. The gross value of fixed capital was raised from 947,458 million forints in 1966 to 999,517 million. Industrial production increased by 9 per cent. The gross production index of agriculture was 121 per cent, (taking the average output in 1956-1960 as 100 per cent). Taking 1966 as 100 per cent, the real income of workers and employees increased by 5 per cent and that of peasants by 9 per cent. (*Statistikai Évkönyv*, 1967.)

In other words: the further development of our social relations is the main factor that can prevent a regression in the consciousness and attitude of the greatest majority of the population and causing further contradictions. Thus the problem cannot be reduced simply to the well known one of "existence and consciousness". This becomes evident if beyond general truths we take a closer look at our relations. In brief, the factors that have to be reckoned with are the following:

1. Certain survivals of outworn social relations still exist in our society.
2. The principle of remuneration according to the results of one's work is still not sufficiently respected in our society, though it is also a great educational force able to transform the thinking of the population.
3. The numerical growth of the working class also increased its social importance. But from the political point of view – and it would be a mistake not to recognize this – there is a large differentiation within the working class and considerable differences between its individual categories. This is due both to socio-historic and to economic reasons. It is only on the basis of a concrete analysis of this differentiation that the political, educational and cultural tasks and methods for their elimination can be indicated, and the process for the political and ideological unification of the class can be accelerated.
4. The base of socialist agriculture, the cooperatives, has been established. But they still have to become real socialist enterprises, that is, to be given socialist content from the point of view of organization, economic activity and the development of the peasant's way of thinking. The development of the coop peasants' mentality is determined by several factors that have to be reckoned with. These are the relative cultural backwardness of villages in comparison with the towns, the still existing, though ever diminishing, contradictions in the ranks of the coops' peasantry, which originate from the earlier division based on property, the differences in the living conditions between workers and peasants, the division of labour between collective and household plots, etc.
5. The numerical and political development of our intelligentsia is reflected by the results achieved in the fields of culture and sciences. The overwhelming majority of the intelligentsia is for the building of socialism even if they still have some reservations and non-Marxist views. This development has been influenced by the policies of the Party and by social reality. But it was also promoted by the ideological struggle we waged with the help of Marxism-Leninism and with the participation of the best part of the intelligentsia against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois views. The struggle resulted in creative works by which the success of this struggle can be measured.²³ An examination and appreciation of this cannot, however, disregard the fact that contradictions still exist between the social requirements imposed on important strata of the intelligentsia, e.g. teachers, and the level of their socialist world outlook. As far as old ideologies are concerned the traces of nationalism are still evident in some literary works, but non-Marxist phenomena present themselves most of all in more modern forms. The most

²³ It is perhaps worth while to mention in this respect the development of book publishing. During the ten years examined here the number of books published increased by over 40 per cent, the number of copies by almost 100 per cent. In 1955 about 23 million copies were published, while in 1965 nearly 45 million. It is especially important that while in 1955 the population spent 144 million forints on books, in 1965 this sum increased fivefold, i.e., it reached 615 millions.

characteristic ones are "depoliticization", "disideologization", that is, ideological indifference, which we find at times in literary and artistic circles.

6. The artisan cooperatives belong to the socialist sector of our society, but from the point of view of the formation of consciousness they present a complex and difficult problem, first of all because of the peculiarities of their sources of manpower, the character of the organization of their work, the dispersion of workplaces and the high number of those working for them out of their homes.

7. These problems are considerably influenced by the international situation. Our army had and has to be provided with modern military technology. Increased dissemination and acceptance of the principle of peaceful coexistence and the isolation of imperialist aggression would make it possible to devote larger resources to economic development and thereby raising living standards. The results of the international division of labour and especially the successes of the cooperation of the socialist countries also advance the solution of the political and ideological problems within our country. The spreading of socialist ideology, the formation of the socialist consciousness of our working people is made more difficult by the unfavourable economic effects of the present complicated international situation, the serious differences in the international workers' movement and the actual contradictions which – despite the great results of the cooperation among the member-states within the Council of Mutual Economic Aid – show certain autarchic tendencies.

8. A very important precondition of the development of socialist consciousness is a more intense implementation and development of democracy in society. The development of socialist democracy is a process which depends on social and international circumstances. It is impossible to complete the building of socialism or to solve the tasks of the economic reform without increasing the social activity of the working people. We have considerable results in this field as well, which is most apparent in the development of the socialist brigade movement.²⁴ But further steps have to be taken. For democracy is not only judged by workers on the basis of the opportunity to participate in production conferences or to go to the polls once in four years to vote in the election of their representatives, though these are also significant achievements. The decisive factor is, however, the degree of their participation at the formation of the Party's and the Government's policies. Workers examine to what extent their remarks, proposals are being taken into account, to what extent they can take part in the implementation of the policies they also accept and support. And this means that the reform of economic management also requires the development of democracy in our society, because this is one of the factors making the solution of increasingly more complex tasks possible.

²⁴ At the time of the Second National Congress in March 19–20, 1965, of the socialist brigades there were altogether 20,000 brigades with over 600,000 workers taking part in the movement. After the socialist reorganization of agriculture, the socialist brigade movement began to spread in agriculture, too. It attracted young people, as proved by the fact that about 8,000 youth brigades are functioning in the country. The movement developed among intellectuals, too, among the technical, research and planning workers and achieved great successes in trade, banking and the catering industry. On the basis of the rapid development of socialist brigade movement competition began to spread for the title of "socialist-workshop, factory, enterprise, farm, or institution".

This democracy is not only a precondition of the development of socialist consciousness, but is an organic part of the process of the further development of our society, and in a certain sense is identical with this process. One of the most characteristic features of the next period of the development of the whole socialist world system will probably be the spreading of and conscious search for more consistent forms of proletarian democracy. This could be slowed down by an unfavourable development of the international situation, but under favourable conditions this process will be accelerated, socialism will have greater drawing power and become a "material force" on a world scale.

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It is worthwhile to make some observations in connection with the elaboration of the history of the decade analysed here.

One of the characteristic features of the history of this period was the ideological and scientific upsurge in Hungary. Dogmatism and the cult of personality had their worst effects on the social sciences, but the general atmosphere also hindered the development of the natural sciences. After the suppression of the counter-revolution in the autumn of 1956 a favourable atmosphere was gradually created, in which there were no political obstacles to free scientific research. Our state considerably increased financial assistance to culture and science. Our scientists and research workers came into contact with international scientific life, had freer opportunities for study tours and participated at international conferences. Our country undertook the organization of a number of important international meetings. Creative initiative and research were stimulated and encouraged by the MSzMP in all spheres of science. This contributed considerably to the elimination of our relative backwardness in the social sciences. There was, literally, a revitalization in some branches of the social sciences and it was during this decade that extensive scientific research was started by Marxist sociologist in Hungary.

This was also true regarding historiography. The number of studies published and the number of research workers themselves increased, as did the lively debates over some fundamental questions. There was a particularly wide exchange of views about the evaluation of the main theoretical and historical problems of the people's democratic revolution that had begun after the liberation of our country. The discussion initiated by Academician Eric Molnár about the question of nations and nationalities, of our progressive traditions and nationalism was of no lesser importance. This was made all the more significant by the fact that, as has already been mentioned, the struggle against nationalist views and tendencies was of particular political importance after the counter-revolution. The "Guidelines on Ideology" made public by the MSzMP in the summer of 1965, once again declared that nationalism in Hungary is the ideology which affects the largest number of people and endangers the development of socialism. This ideology is a primary element of the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois anti-Marxist tendencies. The enemies of socialism also put their hopes primarily on nationalism, trying to use it to break up the unity of international communist movement and to undermine the cohesion of the community of the socialist countries. In the course of this debate it also became evident that traces of

nationalism could still be found in our historiography in the recent years. The Party also pointed out that historiography had to analyse, elaborate and examine thoroughly the historic elements of socialist patriotism.

There are other innumerable factors, too, that show the progress of the historical sciences in Hungary. From 1956 to 1966 over 400 monographs, about 160 volumes of essays, about 2800 essays and articles had been published as well as 600 source-material collections. Development is also characterized by the figures on academic degrees awarded. From 1951 to 1956 four research workers were awarded the title of "Doctor of Historical Sciences", while the title of "Candidate of Historical Sciences" was awarded to twenty-nine. From 1957 to the middle of 1966 the degree 'Doctor' was awarded to another fifteen, the degree 'Candidate' to one hundred and thirty-three historians. There are other indications, in addition, of the high international esteem in which Hungarian historiography is held.

In the evaluation of this impressive development of historical science two extremist views can be found. Some believe that this development is a direct continuation of the process interrupted by the counter-revolution of autumn, 1956. Others assert that this progress could only be so rapid and effective because "it represents a qualitative change in and a radical break with the previous conceptions" and only those of its features are positive, which differ from and negate the former period.

Both standpoints are erroneous and unhistorical. This decade was characterized, on the one hand, by conservation and continuation, and, on the other, by a new start and work of higher level. It conserved and continued all that had been correct and effective in the application of Marxist theory to Hungarian history, and on the other hand it also meant a new start when it raised to a higher level the analysis of the historic processes in the evaluation of which the cult of personality and dogmatism had led us astray. This ten year period of Hungarian historiography can only be correctly evaluated and measured in its dialectical inter-relationships.

The fact and statistics quoted above show, of course, only a quantitative rise and are not in themselves absolute proof of the lasting dynamic development in content and quality of this branch of science. However, in this study it is impossible to review even quantitatively the rich historiographic results of the ten years outlined in its main processes, and even less possible to evaluate qualitatively this large body of creative work. This would merit a separate study. However, it can be pointed out here, too, that the quantitative rise indicated above is partly a guarantee and, in any case, a precondition for a qualitative development. This quantitative breakthrough derives from the release of creative energies from the bonds of the cult of personality and dogmatism. It is of course inevitable that premature works can also be found in such a large output. Some facts are, however, undeniable:

1. Historiographic activity was characterized in general in the period following the counter-revolution by a conscientious research of source-material, a faithful disclosure of objective historic truth, a many-sided analysis of facts, an effort aspiring to a Marxist-Leninist scientific approach. This most important achievement is not lessened by the fact that at times in the course of this great upsurge, besides some mistakes, anti-Marxist views and endeavours also occurred.

2. Besides the theoretical and methodological development – which was a basic precondition of up-to-dateness – substantial changes took place in the choice of topics in favour of current history and themes of special importance for the shaping of a socialist attitude to history. Research in the history of people's democracy was increased, though in the period examined it was limited to the years 1945–1948.

This was in part due to the fact that the analysis of the present period is always a particularly difficult task for historians. Some research workers doubt its scientific significance and justification. They say that the research and evaluation of current history is the task for future generations as today historical perspective is lacking, individuals and groups are directly concerned and therefore the danger of subjectivity exists. This seems to be justified by the fact that the historian is himself taking part in the shaping of this age and therefore his judgement is influenced by his subjective reactions.

However this opinion is refuted by the history of historiography. From ancient times through bourgeois historiography until the classics of Marxism-Leninism, theoreticians and researchers have been able to grasp the most important features of their own age and the validity of their works remains unquestioned. Of course, some aspects of these may need to be revised and posterity will do this. But this does not diminish the scientific and historic value of these works.

Marxist-Leninist historiography consciously undertakes to be the connecting link between the past and the present. And if we assert that cognition of the past is in the interest of the present and of the future, then we cannot leave the historic evaluation of the current period as a whole to posterity.

Besides the danger of subjectivity, the elaboration of present history is also complicated by other factors. It entails the analysis of processes in political life, economic development, cultural activity and other spheres of social life, which in some aspects, that is, as to their final outcome, cannot as yet be evaluated. The difficulty also is that the source material of this period is not yet catalogued and is in part inaccessible.

Nevertheless, the historical elaboration of the 1956–1966 period has begun and the majority of the works published so far on it are the result of authentic scientific investigation. The three periods discussed in this study have not been equally elaborated, moreover, within the individual periods there is considerable unevenness, disproportionateness and insufficiency, also as far as the choice of topics is concerned.

A simple survey of the topics elaborated by the works analysing the history of this period shows in itself that our research workers have been mostly interested in two themes. The first one is the actual beginning of the period, that is the counter-revolution, its defeat and the consolidation of proletarian power. The other is – especially since the beginning of the Sixties – the socialist reorganization of agriculture. This is understandable, for both were turning points in our history, both represented such phases of development during which progress was more concentrated, rapid and radical than in general. Both concern completed processes, which can now be fully evaluated scientifically (even if the completion of the development of large-scale socialist farming is still a long way off). The elaboration of these two topics was also urged – apart from political necessity – by educational needs. Thus social needs here meet with scientific interest.

Naturally the works published up to 1966 did not solve all the problems of these two important questions by far. Still, the monographs, volumes of essays, collections of documents and journalist reports about the period that lasted from November 1956 until December 1958 and especially about the counter-revolution were valuable contributions to the understanding of the real causes and motivating forces of this extremely complex historic event that was also followed with great attention outside of Hungary. However, a manifold analysis of the complex implications of the historic causes of the counter-revolution, of its development and defeat, is still lacking. It is a honourable task of our historians to fill this gap as quickly and as satisfactorily as possible.

The works examining the period from December 1958 to the spring of 1962 are quite naturally dominated by the central problem of these years, the socialist reorganization of agriculture.²⁵ The main theoretical and ideological questions of the history of this period have received almost no historical treatment. The only one perhaps is a chapter of a manual that summarizes the development of the socialist brigade movement, that started at the end of 1958. The political implications of the history of the socialist reorganization of agriculture and the historic significance of the implementation of this revolutionary task have not been summed up by independent studies. The above mentioned implications of this important event, which is also of international interest, have been examined most of all by scientific works analysing the history of agriculture, the organization of work, factory management, etc.

Apart from independent scientific works a number of noteworthy essays have been published about different questions of the history of the 1956-1966 period, and it must be mentioned, too, that more and more studies are being published about the history of individual areas and factories.

It can be stated on the basis of this brief survey that objective and subjective conditions for a scientific analysis of the history of this decade are more favourable than indicated in the quantity of and the topics chosen by the historical studies published so far. However, it has to be remembered that the historical elaboration of several important questions is already in process, such as the history of the reorganization of the MSzMP, the socialist reorganization of agriculture, the development of the Party's policy of alliances, etc. But these are still in the research stage. We think that the time has come to intensify our efforts first of all in the interest of a many-sided historical elaboration of the period from 1956 to the end of 1962. We aim for a homogeneous and comprehensive historical elaboration of this extraordinarily important period in our history, utilizing the detailed evaluation of the partial achievements and relying on the valuable resource material available. With a realistic analysis, which may be of use internationally also, of the experiences of this period so rich in lessons, the Hungarian historians can contribute to the scientific formulations of the policies of the MSzMP, to the enrichment of the internationally accumulated scientific treasure of the problems of socialist revolution, of the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialist construction.

²⁵ Research workers and readers have a rich material at their disposal on this topic. The first publications were most of all monographs about rural development, but during the last four or five years significant studies have been published about the reform of economic management and the development of agriculture. The most important ones are mentioned in the bibliography of this volume.

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